

A TEI Project

Interview of Don Nakanishi

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (October 22, 2009)

Cline

Today is October 22, 2009. This is Alex Cline interviewing Professor Don Nakanishi at the Asian American Studies conference room here in Campbell Hall at UCLA. This is our first session, and good morning to you.

Nakanishi

Good morning.

Cline

Thank you for taking some time to sit down and talk on this sunny day, on the first session of what could be a number of sessions talking about your life history. We'll start this interview with the inevitable first question, which is, where and when were you born?

Nakanishi

I was born in Los Angeles at what used to be the Japanese American Hospital, on, I'm pretty sure it's Fickett Street in Boyle Heights, on August 14, 1949.

Cline

What about your parents, now; let's start with your father. What do you know about your father's background?

Nakanishi

My father Tsugio, that's T-s-u-g-i-o, "Dick" Nakanishi, was born in Fowler, California. His father, I think, was a farmer or something in agriculture. My father was the second son out of three sons and a daughter, and soon after my father's birth, the family returned to Hiroshima, so that's my father's side.

My mother's side--and her name is Eva Miyoko, M-i-y-o-k-o, Nakanishi, or Harada Nakanishi; her maiden name was Harada, H-a-r-a-d-a. She was born in Killingwood or Killingworth [Kenilworth], Utah, where my grandfather was a labor contractor for Japanese miners in that area. My mother was the second daughter out of four daughters and two sons, and when my mother was four and her older sister was five, and I think they by that stage had one additional child, maybe even two--that the family returned to Hiroshima also, so that my mother's older sister could start school on time, as I understand.

My father--the only thing I know is he went to a fairly good high school that specialized in some way in business, and he was always interested in owning his own business and things like that. I know that my mother was well known among the children there for being interested and being good at art and also being very good in athletics, in particular in track, so had all these medals and everything else for track.

They got married in January of 1940 at the L.A. [Los Angeles] Homba Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, also known as Nishi Hongwanji, in Little Tokyo in downtown Los Angeles, so I assume that they left Japan in December of 1939 to get married in 1940. They lived in South Central L.A., and my father and mother opened a small grocery store, as I understand, and they did well enough during the first year to buy, as I recall my mother saying, a refrigeration unit of some sort, and then the second year having enough money to buy a truck. And then Pearl Harbor happens, and they eventually go to the Poston, Arizona internment camp.

Cline

Right. Now, going back to Hiroshima, now, do you know how they met?

Nakanishi

No.

Cline

No, no idea, but interesting.

Nakanishi

But my mother is the only one in her family to have come to the U.S., and my father and his older and younger brother and their wives all came to the U.S. The sister never came.

Cline

I see. So when they met, would they have been English-speaking then, as youngsters?

Nakanishi

No. No. I would say Japanese remained their dominant language throughout their lives. My father spoke much better English when I was growing up until his death than my mother did, and maybe that had something to do just with his occupation of being a produce clerk, first in a small grocery store in Pasadena after the war, after World War II, and then working at various larger supermarkets in the city afterwards. My mother, being a seamstress in the downtown garment industry and typically working with other Japanese Americans or with Mexican American women, and really having less or fewer opportunities to interact with English-speaking people--even with members of the Japanese American community, their relationships, perhaps both for language reasons and for other reasons, which we could go into later, were pretty much confined to the Japanese-speaking sort of sector of the community, which tended to be either the first generation or others like them, who were called Kibei or Nisei Kibei, who had spent many years in Japan and were far more fluent in Japanese.

Cline

Interesting. So your parents had started this business and were just kind of getting it really going and then things changed dramatically. What do you know about their story of internment? And I'm curious to know when you're telling it, if they ever told you the story when you were younger, growing up, what you knew about it.

Nakanishi

Well, growing up, all I really knew was the name of the camp, and I just figured it out that that's where they spent their time, and I assumed they spent all of their time there, and I was mistaken about that and did not find out that they had actually gone to another camp until, actually, the first time that my parents met my in-laws, which would not be until I was well into my twenties and

into graduate school and so forth. So all I knew growing up was that they were in Poston. I also knew that my brother [Mike Mitsugu Nakanishi] was born in Poston, but that was about all I knew growing up.

I would later learn--and it's interesting that they never sat me down and kind of told me the whole World War II story, nor did I later come to believe that they had the same either sense of duty, yes, I guess sense of duty in some ways, or to bear witness to that event, the same way that my Hiroshima relatives, and this is my mother's entire side, right, because she's the only one who came over--but her sisters sort of had, the first time I visited Hiroshima as an adult, and who, very similar to what I had read in a book by Robert Jay Lifton on survivors of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, "Death in Life [: Survivors of Hiroshima]," where he talks about how these survivors have kind of this necessity of kind of sharing what they had gone through with others, and that I never got any sit-down lecture from my parents in terms of what they had gone through or what they had learned or whatever, and it really came out in spurts over the years.

So the two times that were perhaps most meaningful, one was my sophomore year in college. I came back for Christmas, and my folks picked me up from LAX and we were driving home, and I tell my father that I've decided I really don't want to be a doctor anymore. And he sort of says, "Okay, that's fine." I mean, he wasn't particularly the pushy type, and said, "Well, what is it you think you want to do?" And I said, "I think I want to be an urban planner, an international planner." And we could, whatever, talk about all this later in terms of why I wanted to be a planner at that stage. But he said, "Well, what do you do?" And I said, well, you helped sort of build or, whatever, enhance communities, cities, and things like that, and it's not only the architecture and transportation, but it's social services and things like that. And so he says, "Well, who are you going to work for?" And I said, "Well, probably a government, you know, U.S. government, city government, maybe some international agency like the U.N. [United Nations] or something." And he says, "Well, I don't think you can do that." And I said, "Well, why not? I mean, why can't I?" And I just assumed as a kid who's going to Yale [University] and everything else, I could do anything, right? I mean, but so that's when he tells me, "Well, you know, the

government has records on your mother and me, and they won't let you work for them." And I said, "What kind of records?" He said, "Well, you know, the FBI must have records on us. You know, at the end of the war, we really wanted to go to Japan and return to Japan, but we were almost going to be forced to go, and then the bomb drops and we decide we can't go back, and we had to really beg to stay on, and they let us stay." And I didn't believe him. I said, "I don't think the government keeps records that long," or something like that, but that was the first time that they had let on a little, and it kind of surprised me that they, or my father in particular, I mean, had this view after some twenty-six, twenty-seven years afterwards, that there were some lingering ramifications of that period, and particularly that it would have an impact on me.

Then the second time was when my wife [Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi] decided to take our folks out to dinner, and typically when second-generation or even first-generation Japanese Americans had gone through the camp experience, when they would meet one another, they would usually ask, "What camp were you in?" And one would say, "Poston," one would say, "Manzanar" or something, and sometimes that would lead to additional conversation. "Oh, where were you from?" "Oh, you're from San Francisco. Oh, did you know so-and-so?" and whatever. But usually, I mean, my generation didn't hear much more than that, I mean, just kind of where they came from or whatever. They never quite heard the impact of that war on their lives and so forth.

And so her folks initiate, her mother initiates and says, "Oh, where did you go during the war?" And my folks say, "Well, we went to Poston." Then her mother says, "Oh, well, we went to Manzanar, and then we went to Chicago," because some Japanese Americans in good behavior and so forth were allowed to go outside of these camps and go and seek work or go to college or whatever. So she says, "Well, we were in Manzanar and then we went to Chicago. Where did you guys go?" Just assumed they were just like them. And my folks said, "Tule Lake [California]." And that was like the end of the conversation. And I was like, "What? You never told me you went to Tule Lake." That's when I then learned that they were part of a group of other Kibei at Poston who had protested their incarceration, who had answered this very famous government kind

of survey or questionnaire about whether they would foreswear their allegiances to the emperor and serve in the U.S. military, and my folks were those kind who answered no to each of those questions, so they're considered no-no boys or no-no people and went up to Tule Lake, right? And Tule Lake was filled after a while with people like that, who had answered no to both of those questions, and many of whom, not all but many of whom were also interested in returning to Japan. And with the conclusion of the war, there actually was at least one boatload of Tule Lake people that were sent back to Japan.

But in my parents' case, with the bombing of Hiroshima, they knew they couldn't go back. My father's parents died in the atomic bombing, and my mother's side just barely survived, and by that I mean that every house in front of them, every house to the right, to the left, and to the back, in the rear, were all destroyed. There's really no explanation for it other than the fact that in front of my grandfather's house, where all the kids and everything were, facing the bomb or facing the center of the city was a bamboo fence, and that bamboo fence is on display in the [Hiroshima] Peace [Memorial] Museum in Hiroshima, and it shows that on one side being completely charred--that was the side facing the bomb--and the other side perfectly normal, and they don't know whether it was this bamboo fence that somehow withstood the impact and so forth, which prevented the house from being destroyed.

But the first time I went to Hiroshima when I was an adult, my aunts, very much like what Lifton talks about in his book "Death in Life," the first two or three days we were just going to various tourist places and so forth, and I'm just thinking to myself, well, I don't when we're going to talk about the bomb, but we'll see if we do. And it was the morning before we were going to leave, they said, "Want to show you something you should see." And they took me to a Red Cross Hospital or station on some hillside, and it overlooked the city of Hiroshima, and they said, "When the bomb took place, this whole area was destroyed." Then they took me down to the Peace Museum, where this was sort of the older Peace Museum. There's kind of a new wing to it that you enter from now. But one of the exhibits at the very beginning was a three-dimensional model of Hiroshima at the time when the bomb dropped, so you can see kind of standing this kind of icon for

Hiroshima, this German business building or something with a dome and everything else. Then you see kind of the rivers and so forth, and there's a little red ball or something hanging, and that's supposed to symbolize the bomb, whatever, where it dropped and so forth. So I asked my aunts, I said, "Well, where were you guys when this all happened?" And I just assumed they would point to, you know, we're way over on this model. And, in fact, instead they point to this house right at the edge, and like I said, there's nothing in front, nothing in back, nothing to the right or left, and there's this one house standing, and they said, "That's where we were." Kind of amazing.

Cline

Very. Very amazing. I can't even imagine. Here you are in an internment camp, and on top of it you find that your city is completely destroyed in this unprecedented way. Maybe we can later get to talking about whether your parents ever expressed their feelings about that, but--

Nakanishi

No, no, they really didn't. But as I understand, I mean, they along with many others asked the government, we want to stay here. Please give us back whatever. I don't know what they took away necessarily. I don't know if you take away their citizenship or whatever. They were released, and they sort of picked fruits and vegetables all the way from Tule Lake in northern California, all the way down and made it back to Los Angeles, and I know by the time I was born, which is like some four years after the camps, that they lived in this apartment complex near the corner of 1st [Street] and Boyle [Avenue] in Boyle Heights, and that eventually became my first home. It's less than a mile from the hospital in which I was born.

Cline

Right. And by then, they'd already had your older brother with them as well.

Nakanishi

Right.

Cline

What's his name?

Nakanishi

Mike [Nakanishi].

Cline

They do ultimately come back here, and you're born, as you said, in this Japanese American Hospital. If you could describe your neighborhood as you first remember it when you were young, growing up here in this area.

Nakanishi

Well, like I said, my first home, which I have no recollection of, was this apartment near the corner of 1st and Boyle. Before kindergarten, maybe a year before kindergarten or so, we moved about two or three miles away from that, down 1st Street into what's called unincorporated East Los Angeles, and we get a house close to 1st Street on Rowan [Avenue]. The area, I mean, it still has a fairly visible American Jewish population around that time, and I think a growing Mexican American community.

What I remember is my mother and brother and I going to Hiroshima in 1954, the summer of 1954, before I go to kindergarten, in the summer, and this is my mother's first return back to Hiroshima or to Japan since 1939, so it's fifteen years later. So I remember a few things about the experience in Japan, but nonetheless, I come back speaking Japanese, right, and also I was born into a Japanese-speaking home, right.

Cline

Yes. You're hearing it at home, I have to assume.

Nakanishi

And I'm sure I must have been conversing with my brother in English or whatever. But I remember going to kindergarten and being at table number three, with everyone else who couldn't speak English.

Cline

Oh, wow.

Nakanishi

You know? And that was at Belvedere Elementary School, which is near the corner of 1st and Rowan. I remember my friends at that school were Mexican American. And within a year, we move to another part of unincorporated East Los Angeles on Hazard Avenue near the corner of City Terrace, and when I enter first grade, my two closest friends are American Jews. They're these two boys who live two doors down from us, and that's a story in itself. But my mother's a seamstress throughout that time, and my father's a

produce clerk. My brother was six years older, so I think he was starting junior high, which meant that we were not in the same school, right. Like I go to Harrison Elementary [School]. I think he's going to Belvedere Junior High [School], which means that when school is over, I've got to fend for myself.

So what my mother arranged was for me to go to Hebrew school with my two American Jewish neighbors. The Hebrew school--this was the Eastside Jewish Community Center on Soto Street--they would have a bus and they would pick us up, and there would be maybe ten of us, and we would go into Boyle Heights, right, we're on Soto Street, and so it wasn't more than a five to ten minute ride. My buddies would go to Hebrew school, and I would be in the playground kind of playing by myself, and then within an hour or hour and a half, whatever, they'd come out and then we'd all go back home. That was kind of the way of doing childcare, right?

Cline

Right. An early latchkey kid.

Nakanishi

Yes. Well, I mean, it's kind of better than that. I mean, I went with my friends and was relatively safe, I guess, at that time.

Cline

Right. And you're in a consistent location.

Nakanishi

But within--I would say by the start of third grade, there were no American Jews at our elementary school. My friends had moved to West Covina, which was kind of different.

Cline

Oh, yes, yes.

Nakanishi

I mean, most of them go into the San Fernando Valley or to Fairfax [District] or whatever, but they go to West Covina, and that's a story in itself, of my thinking about both of them for many, many years and then becoming reacquainted with the older one during my tenure fight.

Cline

Oh. Interesting.

Nakanishi

And as it turns out, he becomes a professor too, and he hears about my case and through an intermediary in the math department here

says, "Are you the same Don Nakanishi who used to live on Hazard Avenue and City Terrace?" And I wrote back to this guy and said, "Yes." He said, "Do you remember Norman Matloff?" I said, "Of course." I mean, that's a story in itself. But I still remember, like I said, I mean, going to Hebrew school on Soto Avenue, which is very close, the Jewish community center just being down the street from what was called at that time Brooklyn Avenue, which is now Cesar Chavez Avenue, and this was just down the street from Canter's Delicatessen, the very first Canter's, from Max Factor, from Breed Street Shoal, I mean all this stuff. And so I still remember a very kind of vibrant Jewish community, and even after many or practically all of the Jews had left the area to live somewhere else, many of their shops and many of the temples still remained, and so that is sort of a part of my growing up that I remember. But socially, the area becomes, clearly, very, very much a Mexican American kind of community, and in particular my high school, Theodore Roosevelt High School, is 80 percent Mexican American, 10 percent African American, 10 percent Asian American, with maybe 95 percent being Japanese Americans, and just kind of experiencing a number of demographic changes as well as kind of different ethnic and racial relations and conflicts, I mean, over my childhood. The summer of my tenth grade was when the Watts riots occurred and so forth, and so I think in one way or another, I mean, all of that kind of feeds into eventually what I do.

Cline

Yes, right, a big part of who you are, yes. This being an unincorporated area, the [City of Los Angeles] housing covenants that existed up until the end of the fifties would not have been valid there, I presume. Hence all these people kind of congregating in an area where they could congregate? What do you think drew this diverse number of people to that area?

Nakanishi

I'm not sure. But it clearly was very much a port of entry, I mean for immigrants as well as for people from other parts of the country. The African Americans come either through working on the trains, being recruited during World War II. The Jews come there, I mean, after the Germans and everybody else had gone through Boyle Heights, and it could simply also be proximity to some of their

business centers. So Boyle Heights makes sense, because it's very close to Little Tokyo and stuff like that.

Cline

Well, we're going to get more into your childhood experience in this part of the world, your relationship with your parents and with your brother, and your education, when we continue in our next session.

Nakanishi

All right.

Cline

Okay. Thank you for today.

1.2. Session 2 (October 28, 2009)

Cline

Today is October 28, 2009. This is Alex Cline interviewing Don Nakanishi once again at the Asian American Studies conference room in Campbell Hall, UCLA. This is our second session.

Good morning again.

Nakanishi

Good morning.

Cline

Thanks for taking some time to talk about your life. We left off last time talking about your parents and your neighborhood, first your life that you don't quite remember, in an apartment in Boyle Heights before your parents moved to unincorporated East Los Angeles. You mentioned a little bit about your best friends, Jewish American best friends and going to play while they went to Hebrew school, and you ended talking a little bit about the changing demographic, the rapidly changing demographics of your neighborhood as you grew up, with so many of the Jewish Americans moving out to various parts of the area.

First I wanted to ask you, going back to this time of your childhood, you mentioned the elementary school that you were going to. When you were going to elementary school, you had these Jewish American friends. I wanted to try to get a sense of what it was like for you, culturally speaking, coming from--and you can give us a description maybe of your family culture, compared to those of your friends that clearly were of a very different culture, and if you had any awareness of what was different about it, or interests. I mean, at that age, it's hard to sometimes say until we look back just

maybe how we were thinking about it, but especially just thinking about your friends going to Hebrew school. You mentioned that your parents essentially spoke Japanese. What were your feelings about this experience of this kind of multicultural childhood that you were having?

Nakanishi

Well, my two closest American Jewish friends, who were one, two, three houses up from our house on Hazard Avenue and City Terrace, I only knew really in my childhood, during first and second grade. I had spent kindergarten at Belvedere Elementary School, but then after that we moved to Hazard Avenue and I went to Harrison Elementary [School].

One was Norman, who was closer to my age, Norm Matloff, and I think his brother is named Daniel Matloff. His father was a medical doctor, or at least I thought he was, and his mother was a housewife, and on the one hand, they took me to things that, clearly, my parents either had no interest or knowledge or reluctance to have taken either me or my brother, and one of those was really one of the last times I saw them before they moved to West Covina, which was to go to some bookstore in Hollywood and then to go to Clifton's Cafeteria and to eat. So in some ways, they exposed me to kind of this broader kind of American culture, and I still remember how excited we all were when Norman's father appeared on television. He was being interviewed for something related to health and something for which he apparently was a specialist.

Then in terms of the kind of exposure to Jewish culture, well, I guess one, I knew that it was different than the religion I was being exposed to, which was, namely, Buddhism, and which in contrast was also different from Christianity, right? So here are my parents, who are Buddhist, but like most Japanese Americans, they still celebrated Christmas. We still had a Christmas tree and things like that, which Norman's family didn't have, which I didn't quite understand. I remember the Hebrew school and the Jewish community center and all the kids there went to Disneyland during the holidays, and I forget what you call them, those little tops--

Cline

Dreidels?

Nakanishi

Yes, yes. And I said, wow, these are kind of neat. I remember getting gifts, and people said, "These were not Christmas gifts. These were Hanukkah gifts." And I just assumed that Boyle Heights and kind of some of the things that I was seeing in City Terrace, which also still had a very strong presence of American Jews, was sort of the American culture, in contrast to the Japanese or Japanese American culture I was seeing through my parents and where they were taking us in Little Tokyo and so forth. So whether it was the bakeries on Brooklyn Avenue, whether it was a kosher-pickle company close to our house on Hazard, it was just kind of different. I didn't quite know what it was, I mean at that time, but it was definitely different from a Japanese American thing.

And then quite rapidly, I mean after second grade, I mean, it almost seemed like there were no Jews left at Harrison Elementary. I knew that Norman and his family had moved out to West Covina, and as I said, I think the very, very last time I saw him until many, many years later, was this outing to this bookstore and then to Clifton's Cafeteria. It was something I kind of remembered for a long time, and over the years I kind of would always think about Norman and his brother and kind of wondered what ever happened to them. As I recall, we may have written a letter or two, or talked to one another over the phone in third grade or something, but for the most part, we had no communication.

Maybe I ought to just conclude this story in some ways by saying that it wasn't until I had my kind of tenure fight, in 1986 to 1989, that--and this was a very publicized kind of tenure fight. There are stories in newspapers. There's a story in the "[Daily] Bruin," the "L.A. [Los Angeles] Times" and so forth. And it's after one of these newspaper stories that I got an e-mail from somebody in the math department here at UCLA, and it said, "Are you the same Don Nakanishi who used to live in City Terrace? And do you remember someone named Norman Matloff?" And I wrote back and I said, "Yes, I'm the same person, and yeah, I remember Norman. What's he doing these days?" And as it turned out, Norman came here [UCLA], got his Ph.D. in math, and was a tenured professor up at UC [University of California] Davis. He had a colleague who was in the math department here, and it was through that person that this message was relayed.

So Norman and I exchanged some e-mails, and it was after I had received tenure in May of 1989--I don't think it was June. I think it was May--and a month or two afterwards I was going to be up in San Francisco, and I wrote to Norman and I said, "Are you free to have dinner?" So he said he was, and we had dinner, and as it turned out, I mean, I just thought that in moving to West Covina, they would have a nice life. The father was a doctor of some sort, or whatever. And Norman told me that, in fact, his family struggled considerably over the years, that as it turned out, his father was not a doctor. He was charged with impersonating a doctor. He was, as I recall, a Holocaust survivor, and either the mother and the father separated or something, but they had kind of a hard life, and he said that although they lived in West Covina, which was at that time a nice middle-class suburban community, that Norman and his brother had to take a number of part-time jobs just to kind of help the mother and the family, and that they didn't have enough money for Norman to even take the SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] test when he was in high school, and they were kind of too embarrassed to kind of ask for a waiver or whatever. So as I recall, he did not go to a four-year institution at first. He went to a community college, then eventually--I forget where he did his undergraduate, but then eventually he got a fellowship to come here and so forth.

Norman, aside from becoming a mathematician, became very interested, for reasons, who knows for what reasons, but became very interested in Asia and China, and volunteered to help Chinese immigrants in San Francisco Chinatown with English. He eventually married a Chinese woman, and Norman and I--one of the things we talked about at great length, and as I recall, we didn't quite agree on this topic, was this whole controversy about whether there were quotas against Asian Americans, which had been kind of going on during the 1980s and was something that I was involved with.

Norman had his sort of ideas of what was there and sort of how you went about proving it or disproving it, okay, so we had a conversation about that.

And for several years afterwards, Norman would write some op-ed pieces about Asian Americans, Asian Americans' education, model minorities, Asian Americans in Silicon Valley where his wife worked, and so forth, in "Asian Week," which was a very prominent weekly

newspaper up in San Francisco, and other things. And then somewhere around in the nineties, I sort of lost track of Norman. Then apparently his brother also had some difficulties growing up, but eventually became a counselor of some sort, so, I mean, at least my imagination for twenty, thirty years, in terms of what happened to Norman, were completely wrong as opposed to the reality of what he experienced.

Cline

Wow. Interesting.

Nakanishi

And, clearly, there came a time during elementary school, when the kind of commercial area of City Terrace--and it isn't much. It's only like a couple of blocks along City Terrace Drive--became quite heavily Mexican American. I still remember--there are wonderful merchants--I don't think they do this anymore, but there are wonderful small-business merchants in City Terrace who would give school children free samples or something, and it was like a designated day of the week in which you went to these places. One place was a paper company that would give us pads of paper and occasionally a pen, if we went there on Mondays. And there would be about thirty of us who would go there, and the receptionist would give us each a pad of paper. And there was the kosher-pickle company that if you ever went there and said, "Could I have a pickle?" they'd give you a pickle.

Then I remember a bakery, it was a Mexican bakery, and it was on the way to school, and I mean, I sort of remember almost every day going in there in the morning and asking if I could have a cookie, and they'd usually give us probably a day-old cookie, or sometimes a fresh one. And the various sort of Mexican restaurants that opened up--East Los Angeles became, I mean, quite heavily a Mexican American community very, very quickly.

There were Japanese Americans in City Terrace. Probably on every block, there was at least one family. Let's say one family out of ten or fifteen, and it didn't quite have the concentration of Boyle Heights, but there were still a significant number. I still remember in the 1970--I guess it was the 1970 census, that was used to do some of the analysis for whether East Los Angeles should become a city, that the census had some three thousand Japanese Americans who lived in unincorporated East Los Angeles, about three thousand

out of, I think it was about a hundred or a hundred and ten thousand people at that time. It is now a hundred and fifty thousand. And then Boyle Heights, I haven't looked at the figures, but I would imagine three or four times more. There must have been like ten thousand or whatever. It's almost the difference between the number of Japanese Americans who were at Garfield High School, which is in unincorporated East L.A., versus Roosevelt High School, where I went to in Boyle Heights, that had about 10 percent of the class were Japanese Americans.

The other thing I remember about Harrison Elementary was the fact that I had, from second grade to sixth, so four years, and I'm trying to decide whether or not I had a different teacher for each semester of those four years. But I remember having at least three and possibly four Japanese American teachers, all right. So I had each of them for at least a semester, if not the whole year, and I remember many of the staff, of the secretaries to the principal and so forth, being Japanese American.

I also remember that I still must have been pretty dominant Japanese, because I think it was at the end of my first or second year, where my mother was called in, or my parents but my mother came, to tell her--the principal told her, and I was present, that I had to do something about my English. I remember my mother not being upset, because, obviously, she contributed to some of this, right.

Cline

Right. Yes, you said her English was even more poor than your dad's.

Nakanishi

Right. But I do remember that we went down to downtown, to May Company or Broadway [department store] and went to one of their book sections and found like a textbook or something, and she bought a book or something, and, well, I know she wasn't the one who was teaching me, so I don't know. But somehow I convinced them, or she convinced them, or whatever, that it was better, or it was okay to let me go to the next grade, as opposed to keeping me behind.

Cline

Do you remember what grade that was?

Nakanishi

No. I don't know if it's between first and second or--I don't think it was second and third, but who knows. And, yes, luckily at that stage I took it seriously and improved enough so that--but I mean, by the time I was in sixth grade, I was probably one of the best students in the school. But, yes, there was a time in there where it was a little iffy. And I remember the Japanese American teachers being particularly supportive of me. As I recall, I was the only Japanese American boy in my class, and there were at least five girls.

I also had pretty much perfect attendance until one time I got really sick, for one day, and I stayed home. I still remember the secretary to the principal calling me at home, who was a Japanese American woman, and asking, "How are you doing?" Or sort of, "Why aren't you in school?" or something. And I said, "I'm sick." And she said, "Are you home alone?" I think, right, and I'm sure I said, "Yes, I am." And I still remember her asking whether my mother had made me musubis, which are these Japanese rice balls, and I remember saying, "Yeah, she did." So they're kind of looking out for me, and so forth.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

I loved sports at that time, and I mean, after a while I did well in sort of all the different subjects, whether it was math or English or whatever. And then outside of school--well, actually, inside of school, there were still music programs at elementary school, and so the school really encouraged students to take up an instrument in second or third grade, and I think it was because I had asthma that they said I shouldn't play a wind instrument, and so they recommended a violin. And so from second or third grade, I started taking violin. I would take these private lessons with three or four of my classmates at one of their homes, and this guy who supposedly was a violinist with the L.A. [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra], would come and teach us for about an hour, and I remember giving him a quarter every time. So he would make like a dollar from us. That must have been a lot of money, right?

So that was sort of this life I had in the school that was kind of this life I had with my--and after Norman and Daniel, my very, very best

friends through elementary and junior high and high school were Mexican Americans.

Cline

Okay, because I was going to ask you if any of your friends were Japanese Americans from your community.

Nakanishi

Yes, I mean, I had a number of Japanese American friends, but my very, very closest ones were Mexican American. So I had that life, but I also had this kind of other life, which was very much based on my parents', I think, wish that I would be a good Japanese boy and appreciate my culture, learn the language, be involved with other Japanese American kids, and be involved with the Japanese American community, so that involved every Saturday going to Japanese-language school, and I went through first through sixth grade at a Japanese kind of elementary school in Boyle Heights, and then I transferred--I mean, I went after that to a junior high/high school in the Pico Union area. This was a Japanese-language school system that had been around ever since the twenties and thirties here in Los Angeles.

I also would go every Sunday to the L.A. [Los Angeles] Homba Hongwangi, which is also known as Nishi Hongwangi, a Buddhist church, a Buddhist temple which is located on 1st [Street] and Central [Avenue] in Little Tokyo and is one of the buildings, the kind of older building of the Japanese American National Museum.

I think I must have gotten caught up in this whole thing about perfect attendance, because I had perfect attendance for like thirteen years of Sunday school and every year would get a little pin, and eventually, I think after the tenth year, got a little trophy and everything else. But I must have had something going there. Then the temple itself had athletic teams that competed with other Japanese American youth sports teams. These days it's strictly basketball, but at that time it was basketball, it was baseball, it was track, it was swimming, so the whole complement of sports, and all of that, again, has its roots before World War II, but also has its more recent origins after World War II, in which the Japanese American veteran organizations and the Japanese American Optimist [Club] group formed this thing to allow kids, who they thought either didn't have the skill or the physical stature or

whatever, to enjoy sports and maybe to get good enough to be able to play high school and whatever.

So I was probably exposed to particularly basketball and maybe even baseball at a much earlier age than anyone in my neighborhood. The only sport I remember--only two things I remember competing in at our local park, which was City Terrace Park, was football, flag football, and track. But I don't remember them having a Little League team, and I don't remember them having a basketball team either. So in some ways, I was little ahead of everybody going into junior high, in terms of kind of my skill and knowledge level of basketball and baseball.

Cline

Right. You said that you were starting to excel in all the various subjects in elementary school. Were there any that you were particularly interested in that were developing at that point as a possible direction for you, or not?

Nakanishi

I don't think so. I mean, I may be more stereotypic than anything else, but I was good in math. But I remember doing this other thing that served to kind of expose me to the bigger world and also got me to kind of appreciate writing, and it was this extra-credit assignment that our fifth- or sixth-grade teacher had, which was, namely, to look at this travel show, and it was like a half-hour travel show, and it was either every day or several times a week, and I recall it being like really early in the morning, so it was before going to school; six o'clock, I don't know. It was kind of a show about going to different parts of the world and kind of describing what was in this city or this town or whatever, and then we would have to write a report, and I just got into it. So every day or whenever it was, I would watch the show and kind of saw sort of a bigger world. And I sort of remember scenes of different places through that more than I do of going to the movie theater, which was like a block away, and my only memory of movies at that theater were all these horror movies. You name it, I mean, every horror movie I must have seen at that theater. But in terms of being exposed to Rome, to China, whatever, it was through this travel show. So we had to watch it and then we had to write a little report and turn it in. I don't know how many others in my class did it, but I did it all the time.

I don't know, my skills a little bit more refined once I get to junior high, but not so much, I think, in elementary.

Cline

Did you ever participate in the Optimist Club speech contest or anything?

Nakanishi

Yes, but that would be--

Cline

Later?

Nakanishi

Yes.

Cline

Okay. I wanted to talk a little bit about your family culture, so to speak. Your parents are set on you being a good Japanese or Japanese American boy. You have an older brother, six years older. You mentioned earlier that--one gets the impression you were speaking Japanese in the home to your parents, and you thought maybe you were starting to speak English to your brother early on. How was communication in your family, particularly between you and your parents? Let's start with maybe a characterization of how you would describe your relationship with your father.

Nakanishi

Well, I think in terms of strictly language that I think I largely spoke to my father in English, and I largely spoke to my mother in Japanese, and then my conversation with my brother would always be in English. I never recall speaking to him in Japanese.

Cline

Now, is he also going through the whole Japanese-language school program and all that as well?

Nakanishi

No. He stopped going either in third grade or sixth grade, and I went all the way through eleventh or twelfth grade. But if it wasn't for the fact that I spent nine months in Japan on a postdoc that--I think my brother spoke better Japanese than I did. I don't know whether that has something to do with when he was born, in the context of my parents' lives and everything else, right, and going through the camps and all that, and that resettlement period and so forth, whereas by the time I'm born, I think that particularly my father's English fluency is probably a little greater, and I think my

brother largely is speaking English to my father. I mean, I'm sure I'm imitating him.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

Yes, I remember my father for a while used to be like either the sole, or maybe there's another guy, person in charge of this kind of produce section of this--what I later saw was the market itself. But it was a market up in Pasadena called Shipley's Market, owned by Mr. Shipley, I guess. I mean, it wasn't a huge market, but it was somewhere up on Fair Oaks [Avenue], and I still remember he used to call somebody in the produce area downtown, usually on Sundays, and say, "We need a box of oranges and lettuce," make this order. And he would have this truck that only had one seat, and so if we sat in it, we would have to sit on a wooden crate, and there were no seatbelts, and so this thing could really move around, right. He would pack it up with fruits and take it up to Shipley's market and, I mean, display it or whatever.

I also think that that's where I got my appreciation, or I shouldn't say my appreciation, but my preference for sort of unripe fruits, I mean more greenish than ripe, because I'd get something really fresh. I mean, like too fresh. [Cline laughs.] So my wife doesn't understand, you know, "Why do you like hard nectarines?" or something, and hard peaches. But I'm sure it comes from that. And then there comes a time, I think it is in either late elementary school or junior high, where Mr. Shipley decides to close his market, and my father then starts to work in supermarkets. I remember a Market Basket and all these others, and he becomes a union member, and he may very well have been a--

Nakanishi

He may very well have been a union member, even working for Mr. Shipley. I guess that becomes significant much later on, when he retires and I see what happens to my father-in-law, who's a gardener, and when he retires and he doesn't have a union pension or anything else--

Cline

Right. He has nothing, yes, right.

Nakanishi

--and so I kind of see the difference in their quality of life and so forth.

It was really both of my parents, but more of my father who helped me--I'm trying to think. Maybe it's both of them--must have been both of them, maybe at different times, who helped me with the Japanese, with Japanese school and so forth. I still remember, I think it was when I was in--yes, it was when I was in junior high or possibly even in high school, where I had a teacher, and many of the teachers at the junior high/high school, were UCLA students, foreign students who would go and teach there and make some money on weekends or whatever. I remember this one teacher, after reading my, some essay or something, saying, "You know, you either have a very old dictionary, or you have an old father." [laughter] "Because the characters are really old, some of them." When my son [Thomas Nakanishi] was born, we had him go through Japanese school and everything else. It was really my mother who tutored him, so I don't remember my father doing that much with him.

My father, well, both of them would take me like to the athletic whatever games and so forth, particularly my father would most enjoy baseball, which was really his sport. He was the kind of guy who would be listening to [Los Angeles] Dodger games throughout the summer and everything else.

The food we ate was largely Japanese and with whatever little tidbits of American food they can--they either learn somehow through maybe being in the camps, maybe through some potlucks with friends, or opening a can. It wasn't until I went to college that I actually saw a plate of spaghetti in which the sauce wasn't mixed with the noodles like you find in cans, right? Because that was the extent of our spaghetti growing up.

Cline

Chef Boyardee? [laughs]

Nakanishi

Yes. But I think as much as my folks really wanted me to be Japanese and so forth, that there really was this bigger kind of culture, and the more immediate one was the Mexican American culture--

Cline

Right. That's what I was just about to ask you about.

Nakanishi

--the Mexican American youth culture. So, again, the friends that I had and I think a lot of the values and so forth that I had also were very much influenced by my friends.

Cline

How much of those were maybe kind of contradictory to those being attempted to be imparted to you by your parents?

Nakanishi

I don't know if they were contradictory. I don't remember things necessarily being--

Cline

This sort of plays into--I'm still curious about what your relationship was like with your parents just as people. It sounded like you were kind of doing everything right in terms of certain things, but you're living in a rapidly developing kind of American popular culture during the fifties and sixties. How did it feel with your folks as you grew up?

Nakanishi

Well, I think they were also learning American culture, because they had not experienced it as teenagers and children. My brother clearly was paving the way in many ways, and, clearly, I wasn't allowed to do a lot of things because of what happened to my brother, or how they perceived what happened to my brother as a result of allowing him to do things.

Cline

I see.

Nakanishi

And so it could be, one, they let him quit Japanese school, like most parents allowed their kids to quit going to Japanese-language school. Well, they did everything to make sure I kept doing it as long as they could. My brother was six years older. He really enjoyed sports, and he was good at football, and he--I don't know how much this is really true, but he was supposed to become the quarterback at Roosevelt, and to be the quarterback for this sensational runner who was coming from Stevenson Junior High School--I think it was Stevenson, not Hollenbeck [Junior High School]. But my mother was worried he was going to get really hurt and everything, so she didn't allow him to play anymore, and as a result, never let me play football, tackle football. And so this great

runner just got the ball himself, and this great runner was Mike Garrett, who eventually becomes All City and goes to 'SC [University of Southern California], becomes a star, becomes a Heisman Trophy winner and stuff like that.

I have two real memories of Mike Garrett. I mean, one was when I was part of a flag-football team at City Terrace Park. I remember the coach took us to a Roosevelt-Garfield football game, one of these--it's a big deal in East Los Angeles that annually fills East Los Angeles College with like some twenty-five thousand people, no matter how lousy the teams are. I was there the time Mike Garrett scored like six touchdowns against Garfield. And the other memory I have of Mike Garrett is after he won the Heisman Trophy, he came to Roosevelt. It was after my junior year there. You know, it's a really big deal, I mean, to see him. He isn't all that tall, but, boy, you're talking about a guy who's unbelievably muscular. I mean, he looked like a midget out there against all these huge guys, but, boy. And I guess the remarkable thing about Mike Garrett was that he really seemed quite normal otherwise. He was like five-eight, five-nine or something, and really had a sense of loyalty to East Los Angeles and so forth. And my brother remembers enticing Mike Garrett to play on the Japanese American basketball team that he had and so forth.

And then my brother also worked in high school, worked at this Japanese American market called Johnson's Market in Boyle Heights, that was owned by the Inadome family, and they owned four or five kind of small supermarkets in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, and he, whatever, bagged groceries so that he could whatever, earn spending money and so forth. And I'm sure my father, when my brother said he wanted to do all this, didn't hesitate to let him do it. I mean, they're all working-class people and so forth, and that probably seemed quite normal to allow him to work and so forth. But my brother's grades didn't match what I think maybe my parents thought he ought to be doing and so forth, so when it came time for whether I was going to work or not in high school, no, they wouldn't allow that.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

So there are a lot of things that my brother kind of paved ahead of me, and another was Boy Scouts [of America]. My brother was part of this very famous Boy Scout troop in Little Tokyo called Koyasan Boy Scout Group, which had a drum-and-bugle corps and was part of Koyasan Buddhist Temple, and the reputation was, everyone learned how to smoke there and drink and everything else, and so my parents wouldn't allow me to become a Boy Scout.

I still--I mean, my memories of my parents throughout my life have been that they have always been very, very supportive. They had certain views that I thought were completely wrong at times and which I later would concede they were probably right. I still remember, and I don't exactly remember what the topic or episode was, but I still remember my mother telling me in college, "You can have all the education you want, but you don't know anything." And I think by that she meant, you don't have any experience and stuff like that.

I remember my mother--both my folks, I mean, they went through high school, didn't have any college, but they read all the time. And then sometime around in late elementary, early junior high, there are Japanese television programs that suddenly appeared.

Cline

This is right where I was headed in asking.

Nakanishi

Then they would watch Japanese television programs like many other people. They would always listen to, I guess it was called "Radio Little Tokyo," which was every Sunday morning, and like most parents, they would drop me off wherever they would--particularly Japanese-language school or even the Buddhist church, and then go do something else and then come back, and they were not really active in any of these activities. They were not the leader types or the real involved types.

They tended to be--I don't know. I don't know if they were shy. I don't know if the war had had some impact on all of this. I think I mentioned in that last interview that the fact that they had gone to Tule Lake and the way in which much of the rest of the Japanese American community kind of ostracized people who had answered no to those two kind of loyalty questions, and also their Japanese language kind of preference and so forth, that they hardly

interacted with English-speaking Japanese Americans or other second-generation types.

It would really take--the one that really kind of went out of his way--maybe he understand what was all involved--was a guy just a block away, Mr. Mits Sakaniwa, who had two or three daughters, and he had a son who was about a year younger than me, and I used to go and play in their yard and stuff like that. He was a second-generation Japanese American who had fought in the war and stuff like that, but who did know how to speak some Japanese and so forth, and many times he would volunteer to take me to the sports games and all these other things, and my folks really appreciated his outreach to them. But for the most part, they kind of hung around with other people who spoke Japanese, either the Kibei or the first-generation Issei. My mother's, I think, whole orientation was towards Japan.

Cline

Yes. This was what I wanted to ask you.

Nakanishi

I mean, everything they read was in Japanese, except for my father, who--it probably had more to do with his love of particularly baseball, but we would subscribe like to the ["Los Angeles] Herald-Examiner", I think. I don't think it was the ["Los Angeles] Times."

Cline

"The Herald-Examiner."

Nakanishi

Yes, and maybe because it was a little better in sports or whatever. Then he would listen to baseball games. I mean--

Cline

Right, in English.

Nakanishi

Yes, to Vin Scully, and you'd have to--but I also think it had something to do with his occupation, because he had to interact a lot more with people generally. Then my mother would largely be with other Japanese American women down in the garment industry.

Cline

Right. And they had essentially originally intended or wanted to go back to Japan and then couldn't, essentially.

Nakanishi

Right.

Cline

How much of a sense did you ever get of what their personal feelings were about essentially being denied that choice, and staying here and raising their family here?

Nakanishi

Not really. Although I think my mother probably was probably more inclined towards going back to Japan if things really got bad, as opposed to my father. I think--and I only say this because of something that I remember when I was in Japan, after I got my doctorate and everything, and I got this nine-month postdoc in Tokyo at the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and aside from this one trip that I'd taken with my mother and brother in 1954, I hadn't gone back to Japan. This was in 1978, I think, '78 or '79, and my father decides to come back, I mean, come to see me, and also to take a trip to Hiroshima, I mean, as part of a tour. We had seen, during my growing up and so forth, from time to time we would see some of my mother's sisters and cousins and things like that, who had come over as part of a trip or something, for a day or two, but my father hadn't been in Japan since 1939, and so this was like the big time after forty years. I still remember my father--we went to a restaurant and we're eating sukiyaki. He said, "Oh, this tastes so great," blah, blah, blah. And he told me that the tour was going to go to many sites and then it was going to go to Hiroshima for one day and then go somewhere else, and he said that he was glad it was only going to be one day and that he really wasn't looking forward to it. He said--he starts crying, and he says, "I'm real embarrassed that I took your mother away from all of her relatives, and I'm not as successful as the people there."

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

So I told him, "You don't have to--," whatever, and, "You don't have to feel guilty or embarrassed or anything else." I said that most of the relatives there, I mean, the ones who have the real high positions, I mean, kind of benefited from kind of the inheritance from the grandparents and others. So I began to wonder whether that had something to do with--had less to do with my brother and myself, I mean, kind of having a life in America, versus maybe his

reluctance to go back, and plus he had his two brothers in the United States.

Cline

Right. Interesting.

Nakanishi

So that was kind of, I mean--I think understanding what my parents were thinking and undergoing throughout my, well, not only growing up, but even in later life--I mean, after my father passed away ten years ago, and my mother, at least for a couple of years, or at least for a year, was reasonably okay until she really got to become quite depressed. And I would always ask her, "Do you want to go back to Japan?" And she didn't want to go back. I just thought it was unfortunate she didn't want to do that, and I think it was because she didn't want them to see how she had become. I said, "Well, you're in much better shape than many of them are," and stuff like that, but it's kind of sad in the end that the longest-surviving kids in that family were the two oldest ones, her older sister and her, and in the end, neither was in a position to be able to see the other in person. So I think the last time they saw each other was maybe fifteen years ago or whatever.

But I do think that kind of growing up in that family really, and the more I analyzed it, I mean, gave me this very, very nuanced kind of understanding of sort of a transnational relationship that so many immigrants go through. And then when you put that in the context of U.S.-Japan relations and all the ups and downs of that and sort of how either a minority experience or an immigrant experience plays itself out in that relationship, all the way from something as extreme as being incarcerated to, in some ways, feeling some very, very positive sort of ramifications from good relations between these two countries and so forth, I think has served me in more scholarly ways, in terms of the kinds of research I've done in that particular area of looking at minorities in the context of international politics. But it's a very, very complicated thing. And I think also in some ways, the Japanese American experience in that context of U.S.-Japan relations or in relation to Japan is, in its way, has its very, very unique kinds of dimensions to it.

Cline

Right. For sure. And fortunately for your parents, they lived within close proximity to Little Tokyo. How would you describe Little Tokyo as it was when you were a youngster?

Nakanishi

Well, I'm trying to remember the old Little Tokyo. I mean, what comes to my mind right now is kind of how Little Tokyo has looked for the last twenty-five years or thirty years.

Cline

Right, which is what I'm trying to get at. I think that's how most people think of it, because so much has happened down there.

Nakanishi

Well, let me look at Little Tokyo through the most common way in which I viewed it, which was mainly going there every Sunday to the Nishi Hongwanji Temple, which was on 1st and Central. This was the largest Japanese American Buddhist temple in southern California, maybe even in the whole country, has about three or four thousand families. They have good attendance, but it's not great. It's not like a Christian church or whatever. I remember we would have like an opening kind of religious ceremony of chanting and having a minister give a sermon, and little did I know that in so many ways, this was very much an American invention. It was not what people did in Buddhist churches, temples in Japan, okay?

Cline

Right. Yes, very much so.

Nakanishi

So we'd get a sermon. We even called this thing Sunday school, right, at that time at least. But we do chant, until they actually translated what we were saying. I mean, we didn't know what the heck we're doing, right. And I'm sure my friends who didn't go to Japanese school just assumed we were saying something in Japanese, when it wasn't even Japanese. But we had an organ. We had some songs. People say we had a song like "Buddha Loves Me," but I don't believe that. But we did have--

Cline

[laughs] Yes. Sung to the tune of "Jesus Loves Me."

Nakanishi

We did have English songs played to an organ and so forth, and then we also had the chanting. We had the incense offerings and all that. And, clearly, when you saw kind of the stage, you didn't see a

cross up there, you saw all these other things. And then the message--I mean, our ministers tended to be from Japan, so whose English wasn't always the greatest, nor were they, whatever, hired or whatever, placed there for their oratorical skills or whatever, and so it really varied. I mean, we had some very, very good ones, and others, well, not so good.

After the service, we would have to go to, quote, "Sunday school." Years later they would call that Dharma school, so that made it sound a little more Buddhist. But we had Sunday school, and it was divided up into grade levels and so forth. Then it ended, and then we would go home, and I'm trying to think whether it was between the service and Sunday school, or if it was after Sunday school that I would go, along with a handful of my friends, kind of out the back door of the temple, down it seemed like a little alley, not much of an alley, and we would suddenly be next to Far East Café. Far East Café was one of two Chinese restaurants in Little Tokyo, and later on I would go to high school with the son of the owner, a guy named Do Mar, and we would go into Far East, and we would get these Chinese plums and things like that. Then we'd run back to the temple as if nobody saw us.

And I still remember that in my Sunday school classes, that we had the sons and daughters of a number of shop owners and professionals who had their stores and offices in Little Tokyo. So we had the two sons of the only optometrist who was in Little Tokyo; the pharmacist at Kyodo Drugs. We had the Toyo Miyatake Photography family, and almost all of these families, until around the time of the Watts riots, lived in Boyle Heights, because it's relatively close. It was only a couple of miles from their houses to their shops, and at that time Japanese Americans had quite a bit of difficulty moving into Monterey Park or Montebello at that time. Nishi Hongwanji had this real range of kids and parents, from high school or not high school graduating--

Nakanishi

--graduating parents, who spoke Japanese, and others, to obviously very well-educated professionals who had gone to 'SC or gone to UCLA and stuff.

Cline

What do you remember about signage? Was it in English, kanji characters? What do you remember about how signs looked in Little Tokyo back then?

Nakanishi

Both. No, I mean, the street signs were all in English and everything else, but I think until--well, you'd go into most stores and people would be bilingual, because they were catering not only to Japanese Americans, but also to others. I mean, there's a whole tourist kind of trade there as well. But I remember it being, I mean, a totally Japanese , quote, "Japanese or Japanese American" area, neighborhood, with the churches, with all the shops, with lots of people going down there every weekend.

I certainly remember Nisei Week, being a largely Japanese American kind of event in which just about everyone was Japanese American. I don't know whether I totally appreciated that culture and community, but definitely it's something that it was an area and the people that I interacted with every week and didn't quite see until later, I mean, kind of trying to understand, I mean, what, the different influences on my life, that I would come to realize that that was kind of one sphere, and this kind of other thing of friends and where I lived in East Los Angeles represented something a little different.

Cline

Right, when you go home, yes.

Nakanishi

Yes. I think I may have--I could have had a far more Japanese American kind of experience growing up if I had lived either in Boyle Heights or in a place like Gardena, where there was such a greater concentration of Japanese Americans and where many of my friends, particularly who grew up in Gardena, talk about how everybody knew everybody else's business, where they just wanted to get out of there as soon as they could. I guess again, maybe it's the fact that my parents weren't totally integrated into the majority Japanese American community, and also the fact that we were in unincorporated East L.A., that I never quite felt that, even though going to Roosevelt fully brought me into all of that as well.

Cline

What were your personal feelings about going to the Buddhist temple every Sunday?

Nakanishi

Well, one, again this business about perfect attendance. I mean, I had perfect attendance for like--I think I got a thirteen-year or fourteen-year trophy or something. But I had many friends there, and many of the Sunday school teachers were either college students or just immediate college graduates who themselves were very, very supportive, particularly when I was in high school, of things that I would do. I remember when I was applying to college and things like that, that they would be a source of information and stuff like that. I think the parents who volunteered to be our coaches and everything, I mean, they tried their best, but I don't think their expectation level was really high that any of us would be all that good, but that wasn't the reason why they were doing it. They wanted to give us this opportunity, and then they took enormous pride when we did succeed, either athletically or in other ways.

So I still remember Mr. Sakaniwa, the guy who lived a block away from us. He was constantly sending me messages, or he would see me when I'd come back from college or whatever and be very, very kind and supportive. I remember shortly after I think I'd gotten tenure, that the Buddhist church and the Boy Scout and Girl Scout group there had this big celebration for me. By that time, I mean, there was a lot of publicity about my [tenure] case, particularly in the Japanese American newspaper, so, you know.

Cline

Yes, interesting. What was your sense of what your experience with your family was like compared to some of your Japanese American friends, your peers?

Nakanishi

I think that--I don't know. For one thing, I think that the majority of us--I'm trying to even think of one person who came from a divorced family, and I can't think of that, so almost everybody came from like an intact family. I remember clearly some parents being far more involved in all of these kinds of activities, whether it was athletic groups, the church, the Japanese-language school or other things, than my folks were.

I remember at that time that we would see enormous income differences between, or we thought we saw big income differences between most families, whose fathers were gardeners or things like

produce clerks, and whose mothers were seamstresses, versus families where the father, for example, was the pharmacist, and the mother stayed at home and so forth, and who drove, I don't know, maybe a Thunderbird instead of a Ford or whatever, and particularly after the Watts riots had the capacity and the resources to move out of Boyle Heights and East L.A. into Monterey Park or Montebello. I mean, that was a big deal at that time, and not only Japanese Americans, but also Mexican Americans, to move into Montebello or Monterey Park. So we're not talking working class versus a millionaire or a billionaire. I mean, it was much, much smaller than all of that.

Probably the closest family that I really got to understand was the Sakaniwa family, because I would go and visit them and play with their son Keith [Sakaniwa], and, clearly, I could tell that my family was far more Japanese, I mean, just the crafts, the paintings, the food we ate. I think my very first pizza was at the Sakaniwa house, and I don't think I ever had a--I remember, my father and brother always reminded me of this. We took a trip, summer vacation once, up to San Francisco, and we drove up, and it was somewhere like in Monterey or whatever, we went to a pizza shop, and my father and mother didn't know how to order, and I don't know where my brother was in all of this. So that's what we wanted. I said, "We want four large pizzas." [laughter] And so we got these four huge pizzas, which must have cost my parents a lot of money, but I didn't know any better.

Cline

Yes. Interesting, very interesting.

Nakanishi

But I could see the contrast. The Sakaniwas also had some relatives living in a house in back of theirs. It is a very, very large clan that would get together. They'd all be speaking in English, and that was totally the opposite of what the people that came to visit my folks--the conversations would all be in Japanese, and they would tell me later that they had gone to camp together, or they were from the same schools that they had attended in Hiroshima, or whatever. So, yes, in that sense, it was very different.

Cline

Interesting. I think we'll call it for now. Obviously you could just keep going on and on. I wanted to talk about--next time we'll get

into more of your Mexican American friends and culturally what that experience was like for you, both in terms of things like not only religion but food and all those things. And thank you for today.

Nakanishi

Okay. Thanks for coming over.

1.3. Session 3 (December 17, 2009)

Cline

Today is December 17, 2009, heading into the holidays and the end of the year, amazing. This is Alex Cline. I'm interviewing Don Nakanishi in this conference room here at the Asian American Studies Center in Campbell Hall at UCLA. This is our third session and good morning once again.

Nakanishi

Morning.

Cline

Thanks for sitting down. It's very quiet on campus now, so it's a good time to take a little time to talk.

Last time, we got into a lot of detail about your childhood, about the neighborhood you grew up in, what made it unique, about Little Tokyo, about the kinds of things that your parents guided you into in order to make you familiar and culturally competent with your Japanese heritage, even more so than your older brother, in fact, maybe because of your older brother, it sounded like. There are a couple of things I wanted to get into right away. The second thing will be your mentioning of your Mexican American friends in the neighborhood you grew up in, but the first thing I wanted to ask-- twice I think you mentioned changes in demographics in your neighborhood, and one of the specific sort of markers of this change that you mentioned was the Watts riots, which were in 1965, and I wanted to ask you what it was about the Watts riots that you saw that created these changes in demographics and in the types of people that were living in your area and the areas in your vicinity in L.A. that you remember. What was it about the Watts riots that was specifically important?

Nakanishi

Well, I think sort of conflict and violence and both protests as well as police and military response for those few days of the Watts riot were at a scale that I sure had never experienced before. I

remember watching television, just like everybody else, and I remember from East Los Angeles and from Boyle Heights, being able to look southward and to see smoke. There was a lot of fear, part of lots of people. It occurred during the summer, as I recall, and this was not the first of the urban civil unrest during that period. I mean, there were other cities that had experienced this type of unrest, which people attributed to racial conflict, disparities in racial--educational and other kinds of disparities, but it definitely hit very, very close to home.

I recall one of the sort of elders at my Buddhist church, and I was friends with his sons, the Ishihara family, and they had a clothing store somewhere in South Central L.A., and the store burned, and I remember people talking about that at the Buddhist temple around that time.

I don't know if I mentioned this in previous interviews here, but when I returned to Roosevelt [High School] in the fall, this was the beginning of my junior year, I'm pretty sure. Yes, it was the beginning of my junior year, and I was a student-body officer at that time. I think I was the Boys League president, and I had a number of--Roosevelt, as I think I mentioned, was about 80 percent Mexican American, 10 percent African American, 10 Asian American, largely Japanese American.

I remember, for reasons which I still cannot fully figure out, that I initiated a conversation with a friend of mine who would eventually become a star football player, a guy named Zeno Veal, and he was African American. I remember working with him to start up this thing called the Soul Club. It was intended to be a benefit to African Americans, but obviously with my involvement, it was more than just African Americans. I still haven't quite figured out, I mean over all these years, why it was that--what motivated me to do that and whether somebody had encouraged me to initiate that or something. But I remember doing that and that we had meetings and so forth. The membership was largely African Americans, and I mean, clearly, African American students were a very visible, very sort of important part of Roosevelt, and they were--clearly, when it came to music and dress and so forth, they very much set the sort of pace. They were sort of the role models for all the other groups, and particularly in football and basketball they were our stars.

And it would be in my junior year at Roosevelt that one of our most famous alums, particularly as a football player, Mike Garrett, would win the Heisman Trophy at USC [University of Southern California] and came back to Roosevelt with the Heisman Trophy and showed it off to everybody, and we were tremendously proud of that. I still remember that Roosevelt, and it still may be true even after forty years, and forty years of so many kids over the years coming here to UCLA, that I think East L.A. and Boyle Heights may still be a USC kind of area.

Cline

Right.

Nakanishi

When I was growing up, I think the perception was that despite the Jackie Robinsons and the Tom Bradleys and Rafer Johnsons and others, I mean great African American athletes here at UCLA, that USC was the school that had more minority athletes, and when you looked at the football teams, I mean, it's a clear difference between the 'SC football team and the UCLA one. So people cheered on 'SC, even though it's the private school and everything else.

But that's sort of what I remember of that periods, in terms of the Watts riots. I think that clearly the Watts riots, along with other urban unrest, the Civil Rights Movement and so forth, does play an indispensable role in my eventually going to Yale [University], for things that were happening both at Yale and things that were happening at Roosevelt, which eventually leads to some local Yale alumnus to recruit at Roosevelt for the very, very first time, and for me to learn about Yale and then to go there.

Cline

Wow. Interesting. By the time you get into your teen years, what kind of demographic changes are you seeing in your area? I mean, you said that at some point it becomes kind of suddenly largely Mexican American in the area that you live in, even starting, I guess, in your earlier childhood. What is your sense of what caused that sudden shift in your neighborhood?

Nakanishi

Well, I think clearly those four or five years leading up to my first or second grade were really the tail end of the American Jewish presence in East L.A., particularly in terms of a residential neighborhood. So the two close friends that I had, the Matloffs, for

first and second grade, I mean when they left, I mean, it just seemed like there were no more Caucasians at the school. And yet, clearly, the businesses stayed on. I must have still gotten free kosher pickles at the pickle company on the other side of the freeway throughout elementary school, and I think most of the shops, particularly on what was then called Brooklyn Avenue, Brooklyn near Soto [Street], which is now Cesar [E.] Chavez [Avenue], largely remained Jewish for, I think, throughout most of my--probably all of my high school years. I would imagine Canter's was still there throughout all of my high school years, and many of the synagogues were still in place and would remain there for a while.

And the Jewish Home for the Aged on Boyle [Avenue] I'm fairly certain lasted beyond my high school years. It wasn't until, I think, somewhere in the late seventies, if not maybe even early eighties, when--initially, they really wanted to sell it to a Mexican American group of some sort, and as I understand, no such kind of investment group or whatever could pull all that money together, and so that's when the Japanese American community sort of went ahead and bought the property. But that was a very, very visible sort of institution there, and many of the synagogues were very well established and well-known establishments, and people would still come on Saturdays to worship and so forth.

Cline

Where were they moving?

Nakanishi

I think even the newspaper, the "Eastside Journal," the editor was-- I forget the guy's first name, but the last name was Kovner, but the "Eastside Journal," I mean, survived. It was largely targeted for the Boyle Heights area. It existed throughout high school, and the local "Belvedere Citizen," which was more for East L.A., which was Mexican-American owned, survived probably throughout the seventies and eventually went out of business.

Cline

Succumbed.

Nakanishi

Yes.

Cline

So where was everyone moving to then? What's your sense of that?

Nakanishi

They were moving--the Matloffs I think were unusual in moving further eastward to Covina and West Covina. I don't know, just the fact that I did study the American Jewish kind of experience for my dissertation, that I kind of understood kind of where people went. But it does make sense that there are far fewer synagogues that were in places like Alhambra and Montebello and parts eastward. I mean, each one had one or two, but, clearly, more people went to the San Fernando Valley, to the Fairfax area, and to other communities here in Los Angeles that had started to build their Jewish communities even before World War II and were starting to see them increase.

Just a week ago, two weeks ago, I was at sort of a final class presentation for one of our center faculty, Professor Vinit Mukhija. He is in urban planning, and he had a graduate studio class focusing on East Los Angeles, and the class of about thirty kids was divided up into six groups of five each, and they did sort of evaluations of six different sort of neighborhoods within unincorporated East Los Angeles and then proposed different ways in which those neighborhoods could be revitalized, redeveloped, or whatever. So one of the groups looked at the City Terrace neighborhood, where I grew up, and it's interesting to see kind of their plans. I really thought that it would be very beneficial for the current effort to make East L.A. into a city, for these students to kind of share some of their ideas with people in East L.A., to have them kind of envision, I mean, how their communities could look if they had local control, and I think that could be achieved through cityhood. But in terms of City Terrace, they had about four or five of us who were considered, quote, "critics," and we were just asked to sort of make comments after the students made their presentations. So I sort of shared the fact fairly early on that I'd grown up there and some of these places that they're talking about that had really taken somewhat of a downturn during the last forty years, were very, very vibrant communities and so forth.

And after the class, one of the students came up to me and said that his father had grown up on Woolwine [Drive] avenue, which is right around the corner from Hazard [Avenue], where I grew up. His parents are Jewish, and it looks like he went to Roosevelt about the three years before I did, and until his retirement just a few years

ago was an English teacher at Wilson High School, which is sort of in the El Sereno neighborhood of East L.A. He said that they knew the Yaroslavsky family, Zev Yaroslavsky's family, and that Zev's parents used to teach Hebrew at the community center in City Terrace. And I said, "Oh, that's the community center that's across the street from where I grew up. I used to always go and play basketball in their playground."

I remember when I was, whatever, first, second grade, I mean, there were a lot of people who used to go there, but over the years, there are hardly any events, any activities that took place there, and I think eventually it was taken over by the county. Just recently it was renovated and there's some private sort of group that has activities there and may very well be connected with a religious institution.

Cline

So the neighborhood became mostly Mexican American--

Nakanishi

Yes.

Cline

--and so most of your peers became Mexican American.

Nakanishi

Right.

Cline

How did that cultural encounter unfold for you? Very different in many ways from the Japanese cultural sort of experience. You have another language to contend with. You have different kind of food. And you have at that time, I'm thinking here in southern California in particular, probably a pretty heavy car culture as well. What was that like for you, and how did it influence and shape you as you grew up?

Nakanishi

Well, in some ways, it presented--yes, I guess some things may have been in conflict. Some things may have just been different, and other things or other times, the sort of multicultural or multiethnic sort of character of East L.A.--things seem quite seamless. I mean, it was not surprising to eat sushi with tamales. People just thought it was kind of something you could do and it didn't matter all that much, right.

It's like the religious institutions and traditions. The first couple of years when I was at Harrison Elementary, I mean, going with my friends on the bus to Hebrew school every day, and then later on I sort of remember lots of kids, not all but lots of kids and lots of my friends, going to whatever, catechism, I mean, classes after school, and yet being a Buddhist. I mean, like that. So I mean, kind of seeing all those different things. There's a certain amount of, I don't know, well, I guess it was respect that we all had for one another, at the same time a certain amount of joking that we would do. I clearly learned a lot of slang, Spanish slang, and they also learned certain Japanese slang words and so forth, and we're all affected, in one way or another, by the African American kind of youth culture and so forth.

But families seemed to carry on in somewhat different ways, right, and had different kinds of holidays or would celebrate things somewhat differently. My folks did not try to be like strict Buddhists. I mean, we still had Christmas trees and still celebrated Christmas just like everybody else, and yet we would also make a big to-do about New Year's, right, and my mother would work for several days, I mean, preparing this special New Year's kind of feast. And yet, that was like--New Year's was such a special event for Japanese and Japanese Americans, and yet for everybody else it came down to a great day for watching football, right--

Cline

Right.

Nakanishi

--or when we got a little older, to maybe go up to the Rose Parade. I remember that we did know, obviously, something about racial differences. I'm not so sure that we put a whole lot of connotations about social class or other kinds of social differences between or among races, but I remember telling my wife, Marsha, who is Japanese American and who went to Wilson High School, which is a school I could have easily gone to if I lived on the other side of the street, but telling her that while we're growing up, our perception of Wilson High School was that it was a, quote, "paddy school," right? And paddy was a slang term for Caucasians, and it comes from--I guess it's a term connected with Irish, right?

Cline

Right, yes, a common Irish name.

Nakanishi

And yet, if anything, Wilson High School was an Italian school, because it sort of had the migration from Lincoln Heights, from a lot of Italian Americans living there and going into El Sereno and then eventually into other parts of the San Gabriel Valley.

It seemed like my schools, Harrison Elementary [School], I guess also Belvedere Junior High [School] and then Roosevelt High School--we had probably the majority of teachers were white, and the majority of administrators were white, but there were also always a good number of teachers of color. At Harrison Elementary, there must have been four or five Japanese American teachers. I remember Mrs. Martin, who was African American. I don't recall a Mexican American teacher. And then when I went to Belvedere Junior High, my homeroom teacher, who I had for all three years and played a very big role in my life, a guy named Ed Cano, was Mexican American. We also had four or five Asian American teachers. We had at least--the one African American teacher I remember the most--I had her for all three years--was Mrs. Cole, who was the music teacher with the orchestra and everything. And then at Roosevelt, there were a good number of African American, Mexican American, and Asian American teachers, and many of them were very, very helpful and helpful to me, and usually didn't take a whole lot of crap from us. [Cline laughs] So, I mean, they didn't hesitate to try to give us some advice and to use the paddle and other things to keep us in line.

But I guess I would say, still, the majority of parents--oh, I won't say majority. Let's say at least fifty-fifty of the parents could speak enough English for us to communicate at least the simple things we were trying to communicate about our friends, and for others--because we're talking largely about working-class people, and many of them, being in occupations that would place them in more multiethnic kinds of situations, whether they're in factories or in markets or whatever. And yet, there were people like my mother, who as a seamstress would work with a whole bunch of other Japanese American women, and they all just spoke Japanese from the time she hopped on the bus, and they picked up other Japanese American women on the way, and they would just talk Japanese and go and work and talk Japanese, so her English was not very good for all the years that she spent here.

Cline

How would you describe how you were or weren't accepted by some of these other ethnic groups?

Nakanishi

I don't remember that being an issue. I don't remember that being a problem at any of the schools that I attended, and I guess it was only at Roosevelt where I could see a certain amount of racial sort of segregation, in terms of friendship and social cliques, in terms of sort of the classes we took, even though I learned later that Roosevelt tried as much as possible not to like have AP [advanced placement] honors classes and things, in large part because they thought it would lead to a certain amount of racial segregation, and particularly with just Asian Americans being in academic tracks. But as it turned out, they did have tracks, and they did have something called a college-preparation kind of--it wasn't called track, it was called something else, and if you're going to end up taking four years of math culminating with calculus, and four years of science, all of this in preparation for going to the UC [University of California]s or the Cal[ifornia] State [University]s, you know, Roosevelt may have been 80 percent Mexican American, 10 percent black, and 10 percent Asian American, but that college-prep class was 90 percent Asian American and the other 10 percent being African American and Mexican American. But in terms of--I just don't recall racial conflicts and so forth happening at that level. I still remember the gangs of East L.A. and walking through at least a couple of gang territories going to Belvedere Junior High. My house was sort of located within the City Terrace gang, but then to go to Belvedere, we had to go through the Garrity gang area, and I guess fortunately for us, at that time people didn't have guns. Instead they used chains or knives, and, well, if it ever became a hassle, I mean if we could outrun them, then--but I don't recall ever having really any hassles.

I do recall seeing some frightening incidents. I remember once walking to junior high from home and discovering, along with my friends, a body at a park that we passed by and [unclear] somebody had been stabbed to death. But there were a lot of gangs. They were largely Mexican American, although there were occasionally some particularly Japanese Americans who would become members of them. And Japanese Americans had their own gangs, and I don't

remember, I mean, all those many details about them. Well, I'm sure other things will come up.

Cline

Okay. As you are getting older, now you're in your teen years, and you're interacting at school with this mix of peers, what activities would you share in common? What kinds of things would you do with your friends outside of school? I'm guessing sports has to be one of them, but what kinds of things would you do together?

Nakanishi

Well, I guess the dominant thing would be sports, so I did sports, I mean, all the time, I mean, from elementary school on and then through high school. So that was, clearly, one thing.

I remember when I was really small, I mean, somewhere between second and sixth grade at Harrison, I enjoyed--and I would oftentimes do this with my friend, James Cruz, who now goes by Jaime Cruz, but James Cruz, and his father was a big union organizer with the brick makers union. We would go to all of these creeks in East L.A. There used to be this really big creek right near where the Long Beach Freeway intersected the San Bernardino Freeway, right near Cal State Los Angeles, and we'd go looking for frogs and things like that. And there would be streams around there, you know? I mean, you can't even see these things anymore. We also would go fishing at all of the parks. We would go to Lincoln Park, we'd go to Hollenbeck Park, go to Belvedere Park. Hazard didn't have one. City Terrace didn't have any. But those three in particular, we'd have little fishing poles, and we'd go either by bus or we'd walk. I mean, when I think about it, those are pretty far away, I mean, from where we lived. And we would take some baloney or whatever and go fishing, and if we were lucky, we'd catch something that was about three inches long.

And then once we took the bus and we went all the way to Santa Monica. At that time, when you took the bus, you had to go through these different zones, and after you paid the initial whatever token or whatever, you'd have to give him like another nickel or something to go a little further, and so somehow we made it to Santa Monica. This was like when we were ten years old, I think. And then in coming back, we only had enough money to get to somewhere like near around Koreatown, as I recall, and somehow we walked back--

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

--from there. So I don't know. I used to just think we led a quite normal life, until you start to do things to kind of see differences with others. For a long time, we used to consider West L.A. to be anything on the other side of the L.A. [Los Angeles] River.

Cline

Right. And then it became anything around Western Avenue.

[laughs]

Nakanishi

Yes. But growing up, I mean, I thought it Westside was anything on the other--I mean, we used to consider people who lived--went to Belmont High School in the Silver Lake area and kids who grew up in the Crenshaw area as being Westside people. I mean, not Sawtelle people. Jeez, I don't where the hell those were.

And then occasionally our Buddhist church, and I guess this is where I noticed it I think at first, the Buddhist church had athletic teams, and I remember once we pulled together a baseball team when we were in, I think, junior high, and we brought on players from some of the branch temples. And one group that we brought in were guys from Pasadena, and we thought they were the strangest guys, because some of them really--well, what we thought, stereotypically--were white, right? I mean, they would wear wingtip shoes. Their favorite music was surfer music.

Cline

Right.

Nakanishi

Right? And then there's this other group that were clearly influenced by African Americans there, right? And so, yes, they kind of fit in more with us. But you can kind of see how in some ways the Japanese American kids very much reflected kind of the neighborhoods in which they grew up in, and so I think the East L.A. kids clearly had this reputation of being more Mexican American than others.

Cline

Interesting. You kind of walked into a question I was going to ask you, which is, particularly as you get into your teen years, and ultimately, I presume, you become more mobile, how much did you

get out of your neighborhood, and where would you go if you did, in other parts of the city or the area, to do whatever interested you to do?

Nakanishi

When I did not have a car, I would take the bus, and one of the places I used to go to a lot was called the downtown Central Library. So the bus in front of my house, same bus my mother took to go to work in the garment industry on Main Street and so forth, was the same bus I would take, get off at 5th [Street] and Main ,[Street] and walk up from Main to Grand [Avenue], I guess it was Grand, to the library. I remember starting to do that even when I was in junior high.

I think it was interesting that maybe it's because I was a fairly good student at both junior high and high school, and it's probably all by chance that there happened to be, at both of these schools, these white teachers who wanted to expose some of us, not a whole large group, but some of us, to things outside of East L.A. So at Belvedere Junior High, there were these two and possibly three Caucasian teachers, single at that time, Mr. McIntire, English teacher, and Mr. Tyra, a math teacher, a Mr. Caruso, I think a history teacher, who were all good friends, and they really liked musical comedy and music. I'd been playing the violin from, I don't know, third or fourth grade, and I remember they would invite, I don't know, three or four or five of us, I don't know, however many people could fit into two or three cars, and we would go to performances at the Biltmore Theater, which no longer is there, which was part of the Biltmore Hotel, the L.A. [Los Angeles] Philharmonic hall [Auditorium], which was like right across the street, the Hollywood Bowl, and I forget where else--Pasadena Playhouse and so forth, and they would try to expose us to that kind of popular culture, right, American popular culture.

And when I was in high school, we had a teacher named Mrs. West, Nina West, and she and her husband had gone to Stanford [University]. Nina had grown up in Beverly Hills, and she also thought it was her duty to kind of expose us to things. I would later find out from other teachers--who didn't particularly like her, so whether or not this is true or not--but that they remember her telling them that she wished that someone would burn down Little Tokyo so that we could assimilate, I mean, essentially. She didn't so

much take us to cultural things, but she would take us to the houses of some of her alumni friends, okay?

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

So we would go to places like Beverly Hills, to nice places in San Marino and Pasadena, and we would meet with a friend who was like a doctor, a lawyer, a businessperson, whatever, and I guess her thought was to give us other role models, right? She did that with about six or seven of us.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

And then in contrast, there was this Mr. Cano, who was Mexican American. I think he had gone to either Salesian [High School] or to Cathedral High School. He's a big guy, had played football, and he was our--the homerooms would play one another in football and track and everything, and so he was our coach and everything, and we had a very, very talented homeroom group, and we would win all these athletic championships. I still remember when I was in ninth grade, there was a list of top-ten athletes at Belvedere, and I was in the top ten. I said, wow, that's pretty good. But he--the class was--I'm trying to think if there was another Asian American in the class. But out of, let's say, twenty-five, thirty boys, that practically all were Mexican American. And so he was like our role model, and he made us, as awkward as we all felt, whenever we took a group picture every year, he made us all wear white shirts and a tie, and nobody else did that, right. So we just always stuck out. And when grade time came, if you got anything less than a C, you'd get a swat for that. But he was a real kind of disciplinarian, but he really wanted to keep us in line.

And as I recall, I mean, every guy in that class--most of them went to Garfield [High School]. I mean, I was one of the few who went to Roosevelt. I think all of us graduated from high school, which when you look at it nowadays, I mean, particularly for East L.A., I mean, that's quite a remarkable feat. So he sort of instilled certain kinds of values, perhaps using the paddle a little too much, but still instilled that sense within us, and we're so different from every--there must have been four other homerooms in our class, four or five, I don't

know, our grade level, and we would be the ones that always stood out in these pictures. He really tried to teach us manners and everything.

Cline

Right. You mentioned the Sawtelle neighborhood a little while ago. How much were you aware of other Japanese American communities that far away, when you were growing up in East L.A.?

Nakanishi

I knew, for the most part, that they existed, just because the Japanese athletic teams would be developed from those neighborhoods, and I may have visited them with my folks, if they had friends or something. But it really wasn't until I was in high school and I had a car and everything that I saw some of these areas.

But talking about cars, I mean, you did ask about cruising, and I was one of the few Japanese Americans who used to regularly cruise, I mean, because my best friend at that time, James Cruz, and Rudy Diaz and Anselmo--I forgot Anselmo's last name--yes, from the time we started driving when we were sixteen, we would do that. We'd go down Whittier Boulevard and it was kind of just guys kind of hanging around with one another, particularly during the summer months. We would cruise from, oh, the A&W [root beer stand], which was about a mile east of Atlantic [Boulevard] on Whittier Boulevard, and so from that point we'd cruise down to Grenadiana [Eastern], I guess, or thereabouts, and then come back. You know? And just do that for hours. But that was largely a Mexican American kind of activity. I mean, there weren't a whole lot of Japanese Americans that did that. Occasionally, I mean, we would go out to Hollywood, like on dates and things like that. I mean, that was the big deal, I mean, to go out to Hollywood and go to movies, to eat or something.

And then the summer between my junior and senior year, I got a summer job here at UCLA, and I was working in the radiology department, so I kind of got to know Westwood a little better at that stage.

Cline

What year was that?

Nakanishi

1966, summer of '66. Then, clearly, activities like Kiwanis Key Club and eventually being student-body president at Roosevelt, just took me into places that very, very few other kids from East L.A. would have the opportunity to do. So that's where I met people from lots of different high schools and met probably a hundred times more Caucasian students than any of my classmates did. Kiwanis Key Club did that kind of at a large statewide, nationwide kind of international kind of level for me, and then being student-body president, you get called to participate in activities that are like citywide, and that's where you get to see differences. Every student-body president from the Valley was white, and every student-body president from South Central [Los Angeles] was black, and there'd be the occasional other Asian American student-body president.

Cline

When you were cruising and doing all that and you're in high school, a couple of questions come to mind. The first one is, you mentioned popular culture, so what kind of popular culture was having an impact on you at that point? Things like music and TV--what was happening then?

Nakanishi

I was pretty eclectic in my taste. I would largely play classical music, although in junior high, both our orchestra instructor along with these guys would be taking us to see musical comedies. We played a lot of overtures and things from musical comedies, and so I got into a lot of that kind of popular music. In terms of more contemporary stuff, I loved all the kind of Motown music, and I also enjoyed surfer music, the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean and all these others.

I think in terms of how I dressed and so forth, it was pretty much how all of us in East L.A. dressed, which I think was probably a little different from kids out in the Valley. I mean, they probably had their own trends, and they were probably much more influenced by sort of surfer kind of culture and stuff.

TV shows, I don't know. I don't know what I watched, aside from sports. I just don't recall a whole lot of--and then the music, I think it was largely rock and roll until high school, and that's when probably the station of choice was--I think it was KGLF? KGLJ?

Cline

KGFJ?

Nakanishi

No, which was the soul station [KGFJ]. Well, I'm sure that was the station I listened to the most.

Cline

Okay. And you mentioned dating, going to Hollywood, which walks right into my other question, which was, what about girls? By the time you hit your teen years and pretty soon you have wheels, things change.

Nakanishi

Well, largely, my first girlfriends were Mexican American, so from junior high and high school.

Cline

Interesting. You were also, you said, to use your I think probably modest description, a fairly good student. By the time you're in high school, you're getting to the end of your local public education. What sort of academic direction did you see yourself going at that point?

Nakanishi

I clearly saw myself becoming a doctor. I had toyed with the idea of becoming an engineer, but it's pretty much becoming a doctor, and that's what interested me about working here during the summer and so forth. Yes, taking science classes, enjoying them. It was only sort of when I reflect back that I realize I had a very, very rich background in writing and English literature and probably the social sciences. I always had great English teachers, starting from junior high. When I was in high school, I think all but--well, I guess I must have had, what, six English teachers, and two were white, and the other four were minorities, largely African American, and they taught me how to write. They also taught me how to do literary analysis. They prided themselves, particularly at Roosevelt, for having more--I was impressed, but more teachers with master's degrees in literature than almost any other school.

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

And then we had an advanced-composition teacher, I remember, who was this African American woman who was really strict. The first day of class, we were seniors, and she asked the class, "How

many of you are planning to apply to the University of California?" So everybody raises their hand, or most people raise their hands. And she said, "You know that you're going to have to take the Subject A exam, and that's based on grammar and writing and so forth. I want to tell you right now that if you don't pass that Subject A exam, and I'm going to teach you how to pass it, but if you don't pass it, don't expect higher than a C from me, because you reflect badly on me."

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

And sure enough, we all passed. [laughter] She just scared the hell out of us. But looking back, I had this very rich background in writing. Also another kind of constant throughout my life that begins in junior high is my involvement with journalism. I was always a member of the newspaper. I was editor--I'm fairly sure I was editor of the newspaper when I was in junior high. I was an editor of the Roosevelt newspaper for a while. I was a cub reporter for the "L.A. Times." And there's no question when I get to Yale, the first publication I work on was the "Yale Scientific Magazine." And then eventually all the things I do with the Asian American Student Association, including co-founding "Amerasian Journal," has something to do with this very, very long background in journalism. And then just having the confidence in my writing and so forth, which I attribute to all of these English teachers there.

So even though I had this very, very strong motivation and what I thought was a fairly strong background in math, although when I reflect on that, I mean not math but particularly in sciences, when I reflect on that, I mean, I had this great experience at UCLA, but actually those courses I took at Roosevelt were not very challenging--but that's when I really wanted to be a doctor and to come back to East Los Angeles and to serve the people there. But that was my ultimate ambition.

I enjoyed student government and student politics, and I also learned a lot of organizational skills from the time I was in junior high and working with a service organization and just being able to organize events. To be able to set up programs, accomplish things and so forth, is just something--and then also just kind of taking on leadership roles and for the most part being fortunate enough to be

with others that were committed and talented, and to develop a certain style of basically, let them do what they had to do and not to kind of micromanage and things like that, and yet also at times just knowing that I was the better organizer of something, and if we wanted to get something done, I could organize it.

So that, like I said, goes all the way back to junior high, and it goes to being the student-body president, it goes to being a VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] volunteer, starting organizations in college, ultimately to being director of the [Asian American Studies] Center. But there's that whole stream of experiences I've had too. So at one time, particularly after my VISTA experience, which was just one summer in this small little town of Idabel, Oklahoma--and we can get into that. That's a story in itself, but--
Cline

Yes, we'll get there.

Nakanishi

--but I was really wondering whether I wanted to be a doctor, because I said, man, it's going to take me, whatever, three more years of college, four more years of med school, so many more years of special--you know, I'm going to be an old man before I can do anything. That's when I thought, man, I think I wouldn't mind becoming a planner, a city planner of some sort. But--

Cline

That didn't happen either.

Nakanishi

No. But it's also like the political, I mean the interest in politics. When I graduated from high school, if someone would have said, "You think you want to major in bio, but you're really going to end up majoring in political science," I mean, I would have laughed at them. I couldn't see that. But I did have that very, very long background in government stuff.

Cline

Yes. You could go a lot of directions.

Nakanishi

Well, I didn't become the athlete. I didn't become the musician, but other things.

Cline

How did you ultimately choose Yale, then?

Nakanishi

Well, like I said, I think that there's no question that the Civil Rights Movement, along with, I think, the Watts riot, plays some role in all of this, plays a very, very big role in all of this, in motivating these local Yale alums to come to Roosevelt. Yale also, the year before I applied, got this brand-new admissions director named [R. Inslee] "Inky" Clark [Jr.], who wanted to shake up things in terms of the undergraduate student body and didn't want to go after the same kinds of guys. It's all guys the first two years at Yale. So the class before mine at Yale was the first class to ever have more public-school kids than private-school kids, and that was like a revolution in the Ivy Leagues. So he continued that, that sort of policy. That also set certain things in motion in terms of what local alums, as well as recruiters from the admissions office would do, in terms of the schools they visited, the kids that they would seek out.

So on the one hand, you have all the things that are happening kind of at Yale that are pointed to coming to a school like Roosevelt. On the Roosevelt end, one, you have like Mrs. West, right, who had actually worked on my cousin [Kenji Nakanishi] two years before me. This was a cousin of one of the sons of my father's older brother, who was put in camps during World War II. But he and his family actually went back to Hiroshima after the war, after the camps, and they return back to the U.S. when my cousin is about ten or eleven, and they live in East L.A. The father also works in a supermarket produce area, just like my father. I mean, probably my father may have helped to arrange some of this.

And my cousin is, when I first meet him, he's a typical Japanese boy. I think he's a little weird and everything. He's only speaking Japanese and everything. He is incredibly bright, incredibly outgoing, and I think he starts like, whatever, fifth or sixth grade, okay, and within a year, he claims--and I don't doubt that he did this--he said he read the encyclopedia. I don't know which one, but he read the encyclopedia from cover to cover, okay, through all these volumes. He spoke with an accent throughout his life, and he goes to Hollenbeck Junior High, which is right next door to Roosevelt, and he could have easily had the same kind of experiences as many other both Japanese American kids as well as Mexican American kids, who were ESL [English as a second language], right, and for the most part just kind of hung around with each other and so forth.

But my cousin got very involved in junior high and so forth, and by the time he graduated, he was the student-body president there. And for many years, until I broke the pattern, the person who was student-body president at Hollenbeck would eventually, three years later, become the student-body president at Roosevelt.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

Okay? There's never a president from Belvedere. My cousin was a straight-A student, and he eventually becomes student-body president, and he became, with Mrs. West's urging and so forth, became the first student to ever go to Stanford. So he went to Stanford, and he was Phi Beta Kappa, went to business school there, and then when he went--he was working for Occidental Petroleum here. When he was working there, he got an offer for another possible job, and so he was flying down to San Diego when there was this big airplane crash, this Pacific Southwest Airlines and it basically hit another airplane right above San Diego, and he died. So I don't think he had even reached thirty by that stage.

But my cousin in a lot of ways was very much a role model for me, okay. So on the one hand, he had like Mrs. West, all right, and she had a more organized group for us, that is kind of urging people to consider schools other than 'SC and UCLA.

Then you had this art teacher, a Mexican American, named Mrs. Carmen Terrazas, who believed that private-school kids shouldn't be the only ones who have all the advantages of getting into colleges, that they shouldn't have tutoring, they shouldn't have advocacy, I mean, all kinds of things, or recruiters coming to their school. And so with the support of many of the other counselors and teachers, she set up with our class--our class was like the guinea-pig class, and maybe she kind of understood what was happening also in the city, with the Watts riots and everything else, but she outreached to colleges too and said, "Hey, I'm from Roosevelt, and Roosevelt is a real famous school here in Boyle Heights, and we've had congressmen like Ed [Edward R.] Roybal and so forth, and a lot of famous Beverly Hills physicians, and we've had gangsters like Mickey Cohen, and I think you'll find great students here, and please come, they're very interested." So you also had her kind of

pushing many of the very best students to consider schools other than UCLA and 'SC or Cal State L.A.

So that's where Yale comes, among other schools. I remember these two guys, David Toy and George Kehm, coming to Roosevelt. They showed this film that was called "To Be a Man."

Cline

[laughs] Oh, gosh.

Nakanishi

[laughs] And I was--you see this movie, and all these really intense guys, smoking and everything. So eventually, I applied to Stanford, 'SC. 'SC was the one that probably put a very, very strong recruit on me and so forth; Johns Hopkins [University] and Yale. I get in everywhere, and I decide to go to Yale, because it's very strong in science, it's close to New York, which at that time kind of seemed attractive because of musical comedies, more than anything, and music.

Cline

Oh, right, Broadway.

Nakanishi

And just the idea of kind of getting away. As it turned out, there were about twenty to twenty-five of my classmates who went to schools outside of the region, and that was like the first time there was kind of a big exodus out. So we had a couple who went to Stanford, and my very best friend from high school, Castella de la Rocha, went to UC [University of California] Santa Barbara. Yes, that's sort of how I ended up at Yale. But I think there were both things that were happening at the school and then things that were sort of happening at Yale, which has a recruiter coming there, and who kept in touch with me, and when I had that little stint as the boy mayor of L.A. and I was on TV and stuff, he called me up and said, "Oh, I saw you on TV. How are you doing? We have our fingers crossed that you'll be able to get to Yale and we hope you'll go," and stuff. So out of all the--I don't know, I had about four or five interviews when I was a senior--all the other ones required me to go to the person's office or someplace, right? The Yale one was the only one where the person came to my house, and intimidated my mother to no end, and like a typical Japanese person--came over, and she'd bring out snacks and drinks and all that other stuff. But I had a great time with him.

And so later on when I got involved with Yale recruiting, and it's something that I continue to do, and I still interview kids, as much as possible I try to go to their houses. I mean, I realize now that in some ways it could be a real inconvenience, because everyone has to clean up their houses and stuff like that. But I think you'll learn a lot more about a kid in the context of their home and stuff like that, and when I write up a report, the kid and the school have already provided a lot of information about test scores and grades and recommendations and stuff, but a lot of times they don't really kind of describe the home, the neighborhood, and at times when you put all those numbers and other things in that context, and their kid looks very, very different. So I've been involved with recruiting kids, I mean, ever since my freshman year.

Cline

So this actually segues right into my next question, which was, what did your parents of this idea?

Nakanishi

They weren't too excited, but they were supportive. I remember my older brother, Mike, was six years older, and there are things that he had done which made them raise me a little differently. So for one thing, he wanted to get a car of his own when he was in high school, and I think at that stage, six years before I was going to reach that age, I mean, the family was probably poorer and so forth, had less wealth and income, so he had to work, I mean, for his car. I just got his, right? [Cline laughs] And stuff like that. He initially went to Cal State L.A. and did not do well, and so after a semester he was at East L.A. College, and I'm not sure what happened, but maybe it was the shock of being kicked out of Cal State L.A. that motivated him to do well at East L.A. College. Then he went to Whittier College, and I'm not sure why he went to Whittier. I don't know if that was the only place he got into, or somebody convinced him to go there or whatever. I think my parents paid for it. So beginning with that, their strategy was, if we ask for financial aid or whatever, that could possibly limit his opportunities, okay.

Cline

Oh, I see.

Nakanishi

So he goes to Whittier and he does quite well, or well enough, I mean, in sciences and so forth. But again, he's--they're worried. And by that stage, he wants to become a dentist. So my folks are very supportive, but somehow he and they decide that to ask for money possibly could hurt his chances of getting in someplace. As it turns out, I mean, he applied to a lot of places, and he eventually gets into one. I mean, it turned out to be a great dental school. I mean, it's Case Western Reserve [University] in Cleveland, Ohio, which has a very good med school and everything, and the kids, the dental students actually take the same classes as the med students for the first couple of years. So he actually had very, very good training. But at that time, I mean, they were just under the impression that they couldn't--they had to shell it out, and so both through their savings as well as through other sacrifices, they essentially paid for his whole dental thing.

Well, I was sort of aware of that, so it made it easy when I applied for financial aid.

Cline

Right, which walks right into my next question.

Nakanishi

So I got all this financial aid, and so when I showed my father the acceptance letter and everything, he kind of laughed and he said, "Well, you know, they must really want you, because they're offering you more than your mother and I make in any given year."

Right?

Cline

[laughs] Wow.

Nakanishi

I also remember one bit of advice my father gave me, which I kind of share with a bunch of students over the years. I remember I had an opportunity to either work ten hours a week--they didn't call it work-study at that time; they called it something else--or to take a loan for that amount, right, and my father said, "It may seem like a lot of money, the loan you would have to pick up, but maybe for the first year, for those ten hours, maybe you want to study more or sleep or something. And probably that amount won't be worth that much in the future." So he told me, "Take the loan instead." And as it turned out, the loan or the equivalent of working ten hours a

week for the whole year, amounted to five hundred dollars. [Cline laughs] So he was right.

Cline

Interesting. Yes. I think we're kind of at the end here. I did want to ask you one more thing in terms of what your parents thought about something, which was you mentioned that in high school you had mostly or maybe all Mexican American girlfriends. How did they like that? What did they think of that?

Nakanishi

They weren't particularly happy about that. That was true with my brother as well. But I think they realized there was nothing they could do, and it wasn't like we were going to get married or anything like that. But, yes, I think that was one of the few times in which I think their sense of their either ethnocentric kinds of attitudes, or their racial prejudices--I mean, they're kind of connected in a lot of ways--kind of appeared. But for some that they did meet, I mean, they just thought they were great people and everything, so--and not that they didn't have things to say about Japanese American girls. I mean, they weren't all--

Cline

Would it have made a difference if they had at least been some other Asian, like Chinese or?

Nakanishi

No.

Cline

No. [laughs]

Nakanishi

Because my brother married a Chinese American woman and is still married to her and so forth, and they weren't too pleased when my brother made that announcement.

Cline

Interesting. Wow. Well, I think we'll pick up next time with Yale, moving away from home, from the neighborhood, right around the Summer of Love and a lot going on culturally in the country around that time.

Nakanishi

Yes, that's true, and there are more urban riots.

Cline

A lot of cultural changes.

Nakanishi

Yes. One of my best friends from freshman year was a guy named Doug Smith. We became close because we took many of the same classes together. But he was from Pacific Grove, California, and he was student-body president up at the high school up there. But he had the Monterey Pop Festival, and he played some role in all of that, between his junior and senior year in high school. But, yes, the college years were quite something, I mean when I look back at it, just the remarkable period of change at so many different levels. Yes. It's kind of scary, I mean, if you're a parent at that time.

Cline

Yes, yes, I'm sure, yes. I remember it. So I was younger, but I remember it. We'll talk about that next time, and next time I'll start up with a follow-up question about the boy mayor of L.A., because we didn't actually get that story. Okay, thank you.

Nakanishi

Sure.

1.4. Session 4 (January 19, 2010)

Cline

Today is January 19, 2010. It's a new year. Happy new year.

Nakanishi

Happy new year.

Cline

This is Alex Cline interviewing Professor Don Nakanishi. This is session number four. Today we're in his office in Moore Hall in the Education Building here on the campus at UCLA. We've had the holidays intervene. You've been out of the country a couple of times, and we left off last time, basically, with the end of your school and sort of your youth here in the L.A. area, specifically East L.A., and we're about to head into the Yale [University] period. I had a couple of follow-up questions. One is, you mentioned in passing that you were boy mayor of Los Angeles. Can you explain what that means and how that happened?

Nakanishi

Every year--and I've got to assume that they still do this--the Los Angeles Unified School District used to celebrate a Girls Week and a Boys Week. During that week, students, a select number of students from, I would assume, all of the high schools, but maybe it

was more selective than that, took on positions with various elected officials. So during Boys Week in 1967, when I was a senior at Roosevelt [High School], I was selected as the mayor of the City of Los Angeles. I spent several days in the Mayor's Office with Mayor Sam [Samuel W.] Yorty at that time, and I remember the year before, I was selected as the L.A. County Assessor, a tax collector, and so I spent a couple of days with--I think his name was [Phillip E.] Watson and kind of followed him around for a couple of days and went to a couple of luncheons, service clubs and so forth.

But with the mayor, it was actually being there and had a press conference, and they asked me things like whether I thought Sam Yorty would be a good governor, because there was some speculation that he would run for governor. I wasn't particularly attuned to city politics, and I felt, well, I should compliment the guy or something, I mean, so I said, "Sure. He'd be a great governor." And the next day, or when I returned to Roosevelt, I remember a lot of my teachers just saying, "How could you say that about Sam Yorty becoming a great governor? I mean, he's the most conservative right-wing mayor we've ever had," and so forth, so I learned a little from that experience.

I also met a guy name George Saiki, who was a second-generation Japanese American, and he may very well have been the first of several, at least, of Japanese Americans who were special assistants to mayors of Los Angeles. George Saiki took a special interest in me, took me around to a lot of things, I mean, and I remember he told me that he was real proud that I had become mayor and that it was a big thing for Japanese Americans, because I was the very first Japanese American ever--kid ever to have this kind of honorary position. And there were pictures and so forth in the newspaper, the Japanese American newspapers, and he said, "Where are you planning to go to college?" And I said, "Well, I'm applying to these various schools," and so forth. And he said, "Well, which one would you go to?" And I said, "Well, I think my first choice is to go to Yale, although I don't know anybody there." And he said, "I really hope that you go there, because we need Japanese Americans to go to places where they haven't gone before." He said, "What happened to all these people like your parents during World War II, we've got to make sure that that kind of stuff doesn't happen again. So the more we are integrated into society, the better."

So that was something that I remembered for a very, very long time. But that was sort of my experience with boy mayor. I met the guy who was the boy mayor the year before, who was American Jewish, a guy from Fairfax High School, who went to Dartmouth [College], and we actually bumped into one another from time to time. I've never met anyone else who was a boy mayor or a girl mayor of L.A., but we must have had them.

Cline

Did you have much interaction with Yorty personally at all?

Nakanishi

Yes. Maybe about an hour talking with him and then sort of sharing this press conference and stuff like that. But after George Saiki, and after Tom [Thomas] Bradley was elected, he had a Japanese American special assistant named Mas [Masamori] Kojima, who I later interviewed for my dissertation. I discovered that Mas went to Roosevelt, and he went there in the late thirties. He was the first Japanese American elected student-body president at Roosevelt, and I remember interviewing him right up--oh, what's the name of the canyon, the one that goes to the valley?

Cline

Laurel Canyon?

Nakanishi

Yes, Laurel Canyon [It was actually Beverly Glen], yes, and lived right up there and was a very, very good chef and was a bachelor. Then I met the person who succeeded him. Oh, what was Mas' last name? But there's another one. And little did I realize that that kind of reflected some very, very close connection between the Japanese American community and the Los Angeles Mayor's Office, even though for a long time we never had anyone on city council, and we hardly had elected officials. But somehow they, through various ties and so forth, I mean, were able to get somebody in there who would represent their interests.

Cline

Interesting. A couple of other follow-ups. You mentioned your cousin, who sort of inspired you and met an extremely untimely demise. What was his name?

Nakanishi

Kenji Nakanishi.

Cline

Okay. Also, since we're heading into the Yale period, you mentioned a couple of recruiters' names, which the last names were Toy and Khem. Were these, then, Asian Americans?

Nakanishi

Yes. [No]

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

David Toy was an attorney in downtown Los Angeles, and George Kehm actually was an assistant director of admissions at Yale, and they were the two that came. I still remember when this press conference aired with Sam Yorty. I mean, I got a phone call from David Toy, saying, "Wow, that was quite a press conference there." And later I realized that he probably didn't like what I said either, but he was definitely recruiting me and said, "It's a great honor that you've become mayor and so forth. We're keeping our fingers crossed that you get into Yale," and stuff like that.

David Toy, like I think I mentioned the last time, was the only interviewer for one of these schools that required interviews, that actually came to my house and interviewed me in sort of the context of my house. David remained sort of the overall chair for Los Angeles County until I took over, and I largely took over because David got into some trouble and had to go to prison--

Cline

Wow. That's trouble.

Nakanishi

--yes, for embezzling some clients and things like that, which was very unfortunate and came as a huge surprise to many of us who had worked with him on Yale admissions. But that was some thirty-five years ago or so that I took over.

Cline

Wow. So you did select Yale. You said not only did you not know anyone there, but, clearly, Yale is not known as a bastion of minority students.

Nakanishi

Did I say that I didn't know anyone?

Cline

Yes.

Nakanishi

Okay, I should correct that. I didn't know anyone well, I should say. When I got this letter for admissions from Yale, I was also invited to this party for other students who had been admitted to Yale from Los Angeles County. I should say that this is a tradition that I've kept going for all these years, not at my house, but it's something that I organized. Ours was at the home of this guy--I think his name was Jack Ryan--who was, I don't know, husband number five or six of Zsa-Zsa Gabor.

Cline

Oh, gosh. [laughs]

Nakanishi

And Jack Ryan was the president of Mattel Toys, and he lived someplace up in Bel-Air. So I remember driving up there, and most of the streets are not lit. I mean, I just thought, Jesus Christ, I'm going to fall off or whatever. And even though I had come to UCLA in the summer before to work and so forth, I had never really been out here at night, and plus I was by myself. I mean, I didn't know who else was coming. So I go to this party and there are about thirty or forty guys, and there's Jack Ryan. They had flown out a Yale senior by the name of Tom Jones. [laughter] How cool could that be, right? And Jack Ryan served drinks to everybody, okay?

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

Well, I really had not had much to drink, I mean, in my life up to that point, occasionally some sake at New Year's or whatever, but I was not one that--even when we were cruising and all that stuff on Whittier Boulevard, we were not--we didn't have cans of beer or any of that stuff. I mean, we were pretty straight in that sense. So I remember in the course of this kind of two-hour reception, and Tom Jones is trying to be Mr. Cool, and we're all supposed to like him. I must have had two or three drinks, and so with all the difficulty I had getting up to his place, I mean, it was nearly impossible for me to get down from this place, but somehow I did.

When I was there, I actually met maybe about five or six guys that I had worked with over the years, either with Kiwanis Key Clubs or I think one or two were also student-body presidents, and so I sort of knew them. But there were no other kids of color at that time, from

L.A. But so it's not completely accurate that I didn't know anybody, but I did meet at least several.

Cline

So describe your feelings and the process of relocating to not only a place that's a completely different sort of cultural picture, but it's also on the East Coast. The weather's very different, and, of course, this is one of the most vaunted of institutions of higher learning in the country, an Ivy League school, I would have to imagine replete with all sorts of interesting expectations and maybe preconceptions or something. What was that like for you, especially coming from East L.A.?

Nakanishi

I was quite excited about going back East, and at least what little, I mean, in comparison with what I would eventually learn about Yale, but what little I knew about Yale through reading literature and going to this party and seeing a film or two. I remember getting a note saying that I would be affiliated with Saybrook College, which is one of twelve residential colleges at Yale, got a letter from the dean and the master of the college. The master is sort of a senior prof who lives in the college, kind of sets the whatever, the climate and social climate, all that other stuff, of the college, and invites speakers and so forth. And then the dean is really like an academic dean, and you go to this dean for various kinds of academic and personal kinds of issues.

Then I was given the name of--since I indicated that I wanted to be a bio major--a professor in biology who would serve as my freshman faculty advisor. Then I got a list of all the students, freshman students who were going to be part of Saybrook College, and the names of my roommates. I had two of them. One of them was Lawrence or Larry Uzzel, who was from Garden City, New York, Long Island, and the other was Jeff Krauss, who was from Butler, Pennsylvania. I remember writing to them during the summer and kind of introducing myself and so forth.

I must have flown, but I do remember that we packed one foot locker and we put it on a train, and so it got delivered by train. So I remember my folks, unlike probably over half the folks these days, just didn't have the resources to go with me to visit the campus or to say goodbye over there, and so the goodbye was at LAX. I don't remember a whole lot about that. I do remember the night before

that my best friend from Roosevelt, Castello de la Rocha, throwing a party for me, and about thirty or forty people came to his house, and they all wished me well and so forth. It was almost like a scene, I mean later on, from "American Graffiti," that kind of thing. So I don't think it was tearful or anything else, of my leaving or whatever, but I knew that this was going to be something different. I'm sure I flew into [John F.] Kennedy [International Airport], because that still remains my favorite route to go to Yale, as opposed to flying to Hartford, and then taking what's called the Connecticut limousine, which is essentially, at that time--well, still is--sort of a long van or occasionally a bus, and I think taking a red eye, and so I think I fell asleep through most of the two-hour trip up to New Haven, and then eventually making it to my room. My dorm room was in McClellan Hall, and it was part of the old campus, which is where, at that time, all one thousand freshmen lived. That's no longer the case, but at that time, all one thousand freshmen lived there, and all of us were also connected with one of these twelve colleges, and so you kind of had the experience of kind of building the solidarity of the Class of 1971, which is the class when we graduated, and yet you were integrated into the rest of the campus, because you're a part of these twelve colleges. They all had their own places to live, they had their libraries, their dining halls, they had athletic teams, drama groups and so forth. So I remember going into my room, and Larry and Jeff were already in. We had a room that had two bedrooms and a fairly large living room, and the living room had a fireplace. I guess we had agreed that we would rent a refrigerator, so we had one of these small little--well, a little bigger than that--refrigerator, and little did we know that we would be the only ones on our floor that had rented a refrigerator, so everybody put all their stuff in our place. Larry and Jeff were kind enough to take one of the bedrooms that had the bunk bed.

Cline

Oh, wow.

Nakanishi

Okay? And they gave me the single. Because we didn't, whatever, I mean, take bids on the single or whatever. But they decided they would take the bunk bed, and so they left me the single. I remember walking in and saying hi to them and then putting my

stuff away, and I remember having some, whatever, informal chit chat, probably about, how was the trip over or something. And then, of course, one of the very first questions they asked--and they must still ask this for freshman--"What were your SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] scores?" [laughter]

Cline

Oh, wow.

Nakanishi

So I remember saying--I mean, one, I was surprised that they would even ask a question like that, right?

Cline

Yes.

Nakanishi

So I remember saying something like, "It was fourteen-something," right, out of sixteen hundred. And I forget who it was, it probably was Larry who said, "Wow, that's too bad." [laughs] And so I said, "Oh? How did you guys do?" [laughter] So they both had--I think one had 1570 and the other had 1590, and I went, "Oops." You know? But I remember, that was one of the first things that they asked me. And for the remainder of the year, I mean, I was fairly--I mean, I was good friends with them, and we would go to dinner a lot and so forth, and Jeff took at least three of the four same classes that I did, I think. And Jeff was so brilliant. He was from Butler, Pennsylvania, which is, he said, the mushroom capital of the world. I don't know if it still is, but it's near Pittsburgh, a small little town, and Jeff was clearly the brightest kid that ever came out of that high school, Butler High School.

And Larry Uzzel had gone to Garden City High School and came to Yale as a conservative, and a very well-read, a very staunch conservative, although a very friendly guy and so forth. Okay? And later, Bill [William F.] Buckley, when he would come to campus, that was the time when Bill Buckley came into our room.

Next door to us was another suite with three guys. One was a guy named Bill [William W.] Chip, who was the son of a Marine Corps general, whose father was in Vietnam and who actually got shot down, I think it was sophomore year, but survived and so forth. But Bill had lived all over the world, in military bases, and had spent several years in Spain before coming to Yale, absolutely fluent in Spanish, had an 800 in Spanish, as well as close to 1600 SATs.

Then there was Kevin O'Donnell, and he was the only alumni son. He had grown up in Glastonbury, Connecticut, and Glastonbury must have been just a remarkable school district. From first grade, he started to learn a foreign language, which was Spanish, and later on he would pick up, through school, Russian and Latin. So our alumni-legacy kid had 800s in Spanish, Latin, and Russian, with nearly a perfect SAT score; nicest guy. So he was fluent in Spanish. And then their roommate, the third roommate, was a guy named Felipe Aufant, who was from Dominican Republic, and he was sort of part of the elite in Dominican Republic, and who was under enormous pressure to become a top economist and to return to Dominican Republic and to save the country. He had gone to Riverdale Country Day School in New York City, which is this very, very exclusive small school of 150 kids in his class, and his best friend was a guy named Josh Javits, who was the son of Senator [Jacob K.] Javits from New York, so I got to know Jeff Javits very, very well over the years.

Felipe's father introduced him to this economics professor at Yale, probably the most renown professor at that time, Professor Wallace, I think it was, who had done consulting work in Dominican Republic, was going to take Felipe under his wing and all that. Well, Felipe wasn't real good with math, so that wasn't going to work, but he was under so much pressure. He would tell me stories about when he was sent from Dominican Republic, when he was in eighth or ninth grade, to Riverdale, and it was something that he didn't want to do. He didn't know any English, and he said he would just cry every night, feeling so lonely and so forth. I became real good friends with him.

And out of this group of--because we were probably the closest. We were right next to one another. Out of the six of us, two eventually dropped out of Yale. One was my roommate, Larry Uzzel, who did return after a year, but in the summer of 1968, after our freshman year, he was watching the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and he saw all this rioting by students and so forth, and he had a nervous breakdown.

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

Yes. He thought the whole country was falling apart, right, so he didn't return for a year.

And then Felipe, as I said, was just under so much pressure, and math and economics were just not his forte. And he had this amazing allowance. I mean, maybe that's why I hung around with him, but at that time, I mean, it's like, I think he had an allowance of three thousand dollars a year. Well, it only cost like fifteen hundred for a Volkswagen at that time, or twelve hundred, right? So, I mean, three thousand was a lot of money. But he eventually dropped out, I think after sophomore year, never returned to Yale, and I heard that he transferred to University of Michigan, and I don't know what ever became of him.

Jeff was brilliant, like I said. I mean, I would be reading chemistry and biology and I think calculus were the three that we shared, and I would read this stuff over and over, and to me, this was all memorization and everything else. And I don't know what it was, but after a while, not a long while, maybe a month into Yale, I think Jeff realized that he could get by without studying. Maybe it was after the first midterm, he realized that he could just cram the night before and do okay. So I remember the first midterm, he did better than I did without having studied. So Jeff got in the habit of reading a science-fiction novel every night. So you can imagine, at the end of the year, he had this bookcase full of science-fiction novels. He also--and I take it Jeff had a very, very sheltered life in this small little town of Butler, and so he got into pool, and he also experimented with the herbs and so forth of the day.

Cline

Right. I was going to ask about that.

Nakanishi

Eventually, it caught up with Jeff, probably by junior year, and so I think Jeff left for a year too. I've looked up Jeff, and there is a Jeff who graduated, it seems, a couple of years after I did, from Yale, who's a chemistry professor somewhere in the Midwest, so that may be Jeff, but he was just this brilliant, brilliant guy.

And then Bill Chip went into Marine Corps ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], so every summer he would go to some Marine camp and do everything. He was also in the special program called Directed Studies, in which they allow something like fifty to seventy-five freshman to take this intensive program in Western

culture and literature. And whereas I had four books, right, a textbook in chemistry, biology, calculus, and Russian, Bill had, when he came back the first day from the book store, had two hundred books, and these were like all the classics, from Plato to Marx to you name it. They had to write every couple of weeks, just amazing. But he just loved it. He eventually did very, very well. He, I think, maybe got one B at Yale, and went to Yale Law School, and also fulfilled his obligation to the Marines, and he's a Washington, D.C. attorney.

Cline

Interesting. So what about the cultural context? This is the late sixties here.

Nakanishi

So, yes, yes.

Cline

You've got a Marine, you've got a Bill Buckley conservative, you have an interesting mix of people. You've got you.

Nakanishi

Well, Yale is a very interesting place too at that time. There were clearly stars and personalities among the students. I mean, it was just in some ways very vibrant. I remember--I don't know if you ever heard of a guy named Don Schollander? He's an Olympic swimmer, and at that time, I mean, Yale was still pretty competitive in sports. But he and these other guys from the Olympic team were part of the Yale swim team and everything. I remember walking and someone saying, "Hey, that's Don Schollander," and so forth.

I think it was the start of my either sophomore year or junior year, maybe it's sophomore year, this guy named Gary Trudeau starts to write these cartoons in the "Yale Daily News" about student life, and this kind of catches on. I mean, it's quite amazing, I mean, to see what happens with Gary Trudeau.

But the [Vietnam] war is there, and also a lot of civil rights things and so forth. Did I tell you about the December seventh incident?

Cline

No, although I mean, I've read about it in some of your materials, but no, I'm expecting we'll get to that, so, yes, tell me about that.

Nakanishi

I mean, there are several ways to kind of look at Yale, but let me look at it through kind of a race-relations kind of lens. So I

remember seeing a big banner headline in the "Yale Daily News," first day of class, I think, and it says "Yale admits most diverse class ever." I think the story was about how our class was the second one that was put together by this innovative dean of admissions named Inky Clark, and the previous class, Class of '70-- he had departed from going to these private schools, particularly in the Northeast, and really kind of gone around the country, and also putting a lot more emphasis on public schools, and so the Class of 1970 was the first class that had more public-school kids than private-school kids in Yale's history. More kids were on financial aid than kids who could pay their own way.

So our class was sort of an extension of that, and so most diverse class ever meant that we had even more public-school kids, we had more kids on financial aid, more working-class kids, more states represented, and so forth. But what it also meant--and that's not what the story was about in the "Daily News," but what it also meant was that out of a thousand men, because that's what a typical Yale freshman class was, we had seven African Americans, seven Latinos, and seven Asian Americans, and that was the definition of most diverse class ever, at least in racial terms.

I remember fairly early on, and probably because one of my very best friends and then one of his roommates--well, both of their roommates, one of whom was African American--but there were two African Americans, and one who I was very close with, a guy named Dwight Raiford, from North Carolina, who had this amazing talent for having memorized probably a thousand poems--I mean, he could recite poems forever, and I just thought that was an amazing gift that he had. And whether he recited them correctly or not, I mean, I sort of thought he did. And he had a roommate, Doug Smith, who was Caucasian, who was from Pacific Grove High School in California, who had been involved with the Monterey Pop Festival the year before, and Doug and I took a number of classes together, and Doug had been the student-body president, so there's a little kinship there.

And they had a third roommate, a guy named Kurt Schmoke, who was all-everything. He was African American from Baltimore. He had been an All-American football player. He was clearly being groomed for politics in Maryland, and he also knew from day one that he was going to try to become a Rhodes scholar, which is what

he eventually became. But I think it was through them that--and then I think through more public things, that I could see that the African American students, for sure, were organized. They had established an organization called the Black Student Association at Yale--had been part of--I remember my freshman year, our biology prof, one of four biology profs, and these four profs would sort of teach their expertise. But one of them was this very, very popular African American prof named Professor Gooden, I think it was, just a brilliant lecturer. And I've forgotten what part of biology he taught, but I know that he was part of like a picket of the President's Office, to get more African American professors, freshman year.

So I think that was about the only racial kind of stuff that I saw initially, because the Asian Americans were not organized. And, in fact, the odd thing I found was that if there was an Asian American that I did not know, and I happened to know, like, the six others from my class, but for those that I did not know--but what I observed after a while and which I just found very strange, was that if we were walking kind of in opposite directions towards one another and I would come up to one of them, they would kind of put their head down and not look at me, kind of avoiding me, right? And I just thought, wow, gee, this is like kind of strange. And I just noticed that almost all of them were doing this.

Cline

Wow. Now, when you say Asian--

Nakanishi

These were the upper class, mainly sophomores and juniors and seniors.

Cline

I see.

Nakanishi

I mean, I knew, like I said, almost all the freshmen.

Cline

When you say Asian American, how diverse within Asian Americans?

Nakanishi

There were, I guess, three Japanese Americans, all from California, and the rest were Chinese Americans, either from New York or from Hawaii.

Yes, okay, then let's get to December seventh, because that would be part--

Cline

Is this going to connect, this idea why they wouldn't look at you?

Nakanishi

No, no.

Cline

It's just something you noticed?

Nakanishi

Yes, just something that I noticed. And then a couple of years later, after we formed the Asian American group and everything, I mean, that clearly ended, I mean, after that time.

Cline

Interesting. Okay, because I was wondering if you had an idea why that was that they were--

Nakanishi

Well, I mean, I don't want to get into all this racial hatred and all that other stuff, but they had something going on with their identity and so forth. I mean, it just wasn't--I mean, no acknowledgement, I mean not even a nod or anything--

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

--so I just thought it was a little strange.

So December seventh comes around, and growing up, December seventh was kind of a difficult day for many Japanese Americans, I think, particularly boys. But it just seemed to me that there would be some teacher, and it could be a gym teacher, it could be an English teacher, it didn't have to be a history teacher, who would ask the class, "Do you know what happened on this day?" And it just seemed like everyone in the class kind of turned and looked at the Japanese Americans in the class, and particularly at Belvedere Junior High, there weren't too many Japanese Americans, and somebody would raise their hand and say, "This is the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." It made us kind of feel uncomfortable that this was being pointed out and so forth.

So I remember December seventh coming around freshman year, and I remember going to biology class, which was at like nine a.m., and walking, I don't know, about a mile, mile and a half to the

science area, and nothing happened. Maybe it's because we had the African American professor that first part of the year-long course, I don't know. Then I remember walking back, going to Russian class. Nothing happened. And I remember going up to chem lab; nothing happened. So then I remember having dinner; everything seemed pretty normal. This happened to be a day in which I didn't go to the library to study. I just decided--maybe it was too cold or something--to study in my room. Then at nine o'clock, it seemed everybody in my dorm-room building--this was not a huge dorm building. It had maybe three floors and maybe there were, I don't know, fifteen boys on each floor, I don't know. But it just seemed like everybody came at nine o'clock, opened my door and started chanting, "Bomb Pearl Harbor, bomb Pearl Harbor," and started throwing water balloons at me. And, yes, I didn't know what to do, right? I mean, because I clearly was not trained psychologically or in other ways to deal with something like this. So I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry or whatever. And they seemed to be having, I think, a good time. I mean, they were not trying to harass me or whatever. Then I remember this last year's national high school debate champ, who happened to be conservative, walked over to me as I'm dripping and all wet and so forth, and he recites by memory President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's declaration of war speech. So then everyone kind of cheers again, "Bomb Pearl Harbor, bomb Pearl Harbor," and they leave, right? So I remember cleaning up, and I remember starting to wonder, I knew I started wondering that night why it was I was still being reminded of this event. Sixty-seven was twenty-six years since Pearl Harbor, right, which at that time seemed like a long time, twenty-six years. And now when I'm retiring after whatever, forty years of being in Asian American studies and all that, I say, forty years? Man, that would have put me in the twenties. I'd have really been old.

But I remember really wondering, I mean, why it was that as a third-generation Japanese American, at a place like Yale, why I was being reminded of this and being reminded in this manner. I think it was about a week later that I went to the library and I checked out my very, very first book on the [internment] camps, and it was a book called "Prejudice, War, and the Constitution," by three UC Berkeley law professors, [Jacobus] tenBroek, [Edward N.] Barnhart, and [Floyd W.] Matson. I realized that even though my parents

would tell me that they had been to Poston and so forth, I gathered through various experiences of seeing how Japanese Americans greeted one another and asked what camps they were in and things like that, that probably many of them had gone to camps, and they must have left here and so forth.

But aside from that, I mean, I didn't know the causes of all of that. I mean, somehow it was connected with Pearl Harbor, but why would Franklin Delano Roosevelt do it, right? Why would it become so necessary to round up--I didn't know the number at that time, but I assumed a lot of people, right. And what could they have been doing, I mean, that would have caused all this, to put them away? But I really didn't know very much of that, and later I would realize that many others of my generation did not know a whole lot. I think, one, the public school system may have reminded people about Pearl Harbor, but they didn't do a whole lot to really talk about what was happening here domestically and what was happening in terms of civil rights and things like that, or even about women in the workforce, right. I mean, Rosie the Riveter gets, quote, "unburied" sometime in the sixties and seventies, right, and the whole contribution of women to the war effort.

And it also kind of serves as one significant motivating reason why a lot of students at places like UCLA and San Francisco State [University] and eventually places like Yale and so forth, want to know something about their history, in particular some of these big events like the camps. So I remember reading that very first book, and I always attribute that experience to why I eventually get into Asian American studies, although there are clearly a lot of things in my background before coming to Yale that one could see some connection with, and then clearly a lot of things that happened also before I even get involved with Asian American kinds of student activities and so forth.

But nonetheless, it was very eye opening to read this book, not an easy book, but it was--because of my interest in the subject, it kind of goes into the kind of bigger historical context of anti-Asian sentiment and movements and so forth in California and in the U.S., and then it goes into the specific events and policies that got kind of implemented, that eventually leads to FDR being convinced that this is the right thing to do, and then the final part of the book deals

with the unconstitutional nature of it and why it was totally unnecessary to do it.

I would later discover that this was only one of a handful of books that actually had been written about the camp experience, and up until that stage, there are actually very few Japanese American voices about what had happened. So that would come sort of with the rise of Asian American studies and other things that were happening in the society and with the whole redress movement and so forth, but you suddenly found Asian American and particularly Japanese American scholars who begin to write about that period, begin to capture what Japanese Americans kind of felt about and so forth. You find people starting to write novels, starting to write plays, I mean, so it sort of begins to deal with kind of the unfinished business of the camp experience.

But for me, it didn't necessarily--I remember coming back during that Christmas home, and not really doing a whole lot, I mean, that was related to any of this. And then going back second semester, I took the same courses, but what I remember the most was, one, the assassination of Martin Luther King [Jr.], and that happens--when is that, April, I think, of 1968, or May? And New Haven has a little bit of a riot. I mean, we have a black, African American community, a significant African American community in New Haven. I remember the African American students just being so devastated to hear the news. I remember watching television, which was one of the rare times I ever watched television when I was at Yale, and when these days, every kid has a television in their room, but at that time you had to go like to a television room in the residential college, and I remember being with a group of thirty or forty others and watching these reports about the assassination and so forth, and seeing pictures of urban riots in various cities.

I had--and I'm not sure why I did this, but somehow I found out that there was a special volunteer program, something like a Peace Corps, and it's called VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America], and it was possible for college students to do it during the summer, and I remember applying to it instead of coming home, or my thought was to do this, to do some kind of internship. I remember applying to Washington, D.C., and sometime in May I was notified that I was selected to go to Oklahoma and to be a summer VISTA volunteer. I knew nothing about Oklahoma. I remember in the application, I put

down that I was pre-med and I was interested in seeing another part of the country and all that. I'm sure I said something about helping poor people and stuff, and maybe even talking about having grown up in East Los Angeles.

But I remember being selected and flying to Tulsa after school was finished at Yale, and then taking a bus from Tulsa to Durant, Oklahoma, where Southeast Oklahoma State College was located, and that's where we underwent training. There were about fifty of us. I would say forty of us were college students. I think I was the youngest college student, having just finished freshman year. Most were like juniors. There was one other Asian, who was a Thai foreign student. Now, how she got into a government program is beyond me, but she was a Thai foreign student from University of Oklahoma, and her father was a general in the Thai army; maybe that's how. And there was at least one African American guy, who I became very good friends with, who was from Louisiana.

We had a one-week training session, and on our second day, I think it was, Robert [F.] Kennedy was assassinated in L.A. So, of course, that kind of threw everything off for a day or so, and we dedicated our summer experience to Robert Kennedy and to Martin Luther King as a result. We were kind of taught the philosophy of VISTA, which was, don't give people a handout, give them a hand up, or something like that, or something about you can give somebody a fish, or you can teach them how to fish, I don't know, but it was kind of self-help.

And then the trainers would also tell us that, "At the end of all of this, you're going to think that you may have made some difference in people's lives, but in actuality, they've made a bigger impact on you. You've learned more from them than they have from you."

On the last day, we all said our goodbyes, and we all went into one of two buses, and we either went east from there in Oklahoma, or we went west. We would literally go from town to town and drop off one or two people, and they would be, whatever, greeted by the people who take care of them. My best friend, this African American guy, and I forget his name now, he was taken to some rural area and, I mean, there was like no town to talk about, right? And he was just going to be there, I mean, working with some agency or a church group or something. I mean, we had different levels of standards of living, and he had to deal with an outhouse. I mean,

not a very good place to live, I mean, because when we had a retreat, we would sort of--there would be a bus that would kind of pick us all up and, boy, we saw where some of us lived, and it was pretty hard.

I was dropped off with two other people, one this Asian, this Thai woman--she was a senior at University of Oklahoma, and I forget her name--and this Caucasian woman, who was a junior at Colorado State University, and we were assigned to this small little town called Idabel, Oklahoma, which is in the southeast corner of Oklahoma, forty-five miles from Texarkana, which is right on the border of Texas and Arkansas and Oklahoma. We were assigned to a community-action program for the entire county of McCurtain County, which is the county that Idabel was the county seat. Idabel had five thousand people, and on one side of the railroad tracks there were kind of your more middle class, if you can talk about a middle class, but middle class and kind of whites, and the other side of the tracks were poor whites, Choctaw Indians, and the African American community.

Our assignment was twofold. One was to set up this emergency food and medical program, and I realized afterwards that I was assigned to do this because I said I was a premed. But this was a program that was designed to help people who got kind of to the level of needing welfare, but in Oklahoma, because of the bureaucracy and everything else, it took like a couple of months to kind of get you food stamps, get you medical attention, and so forth, and so this program was designed to help people during those two-month periods.

The other was to kind of look at the landscape of race relations in Idabel, because at the end of the summer, they would be closing down Booker T. Washington High School on the poor side of town and moving all of those kids to Idabel High School, which was on the other side of town. So I remember we worked with the churches and in particular the Catholic church there. We met with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. We had a staff member of the community-action program who was a Choctaw Indian, and his last name was Tahnaka, and I said, "Boy, are you Japanese?" He said, "No, that's a Choctaw name."

Cline

Wow. Interesting.

Nakanishi

But every--I shouldn't say everybody on the other side of the tracks were poor, because they weren't, but most people were. The African American community actually had all the different layers, I mean, from the professionals, the dentist, the doctor, the lawyer, the NAACP president and so forth, and the Choctaw Indians didn't quite have that same mix. I think that their leadership may have been in other parts of the county. But the poor whites were definitely poor. And we lived in the poor side of town, and it seemed like every night there would be this train, about a mile-and-a-half train that would come and stop and spend the night refueling and so forth, and would effectively block every roadway between the two sides of the town. I remember we were stuck once on kind of the nice side of the town, which is where the community-action agency was, and having to really make quite a detour, I mean, to get by.

But that experience was really eye opening for me, and one thing I remember was seeing southern poverty. I had never seen sort of living conditions as bad as what I witnessed in particularly rural Oklahoma and in rural Texas, that--and thinking about East Los Angeles or South Central Los Angeles or whatever. I also remember at first, because we would spend many hours outdoors, and I remember my skin getting very dark. I got very, very tanned. And there would be many times in which the whites didn't care for me or didn't trust me, because they thought I was a Choctaw Indian, and many African Americans also didn't treat me particularly well, because they thought I was a Choctaw Indian, and then the Choctaw Indians wondered about me, because they knew I wasn't a Choctaw Indian.

But it's very interesting to kind of see the different perceptions that this sort of mixture of people, who had been together in this small little town for decades--I mean, the Choctaw Indians came there through this forced migration from Florida, the Trail of Tears and so forth, and the African Americans had migrated from the South and had built this wonderful community and so forth, and I'm sure the whites, I mean, they had their history and so forth of coming there. There was a very vibrant downtown area, with a car dealership, drugstores, restaurants, hotel, so forth. But on top of all the other things that I'd experienced freshman year, the December seventh issue, the Martin Luther King, seeing an African American professor

join with others in picketing the president for more African Americans, I remember becoming very impatient about becoming a doctor, and I really began to wonder whether that's what I really wanted to do. I said, gee, it's going to take me three more years of college, then four years of medical school, then two or three years of specializing. Man, I'm going to be an old guy before--.

But I remember coming back to Los Angeles after the ten weeks or whatever and just looking at Los Angeles through very different lenses. I mean, I said, yes, this looks pretty good in comparison with what I just saw.

I also remember writing this weekly column in the local newspaper in Idabel, called "The McCurtain Gazette." I think it was twenty-five or thirty years after I had been there as a freshman that I took my son [Thomas Nakanishi] to Idabel, because I wanted him to kind of see something different than big cities and so forth. We made this grand tour of Oklahoma City, Arlington, Texas, Grambling, Louisiana, Hope, Arkansas, Idabel, Oklahoma, and then back to Oklahoma City, and I remember spending a few hours at the Idabel Public Library, and there was actually a microfilm of the newspaper, and I made copies of every one of my columns. I mean, I thought I was pretty good. I was reading that stuff, and I was talking about the Civil Rights Act and about welfare, the war in Vietnam, and I said, wow, this is pretty good. I don't even know if I can write that well now. But somehow the local newspaper found some novelty in my doing this thing and so they allowed that to happen.

I also remember that when I returned--this was twenty-five or thirty years after--that the downtown area was quite devastated by a Walmart as well as a McDonald's. They were closer to another highway out of town, and it looked like there must have been maybe a drug problem in the poor side of town, because there were a number of houses that were burned down, and every other house had bars on their windows. The African American community was--clearly, the commercial district, the dentist and so forth were all gone. Booker T. Washington High School was leveled by then, and Idabel High School had won the state track title and stuff like that. I'm sure the integration helped that, and they had had some football players that had gone to University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State.

But the people were--I mean, I didn't recognize anybody, but they were still very, very warm. I guess that was the other thing. I mean, they're just the kind of southern hospitality, and whether that's real or fake, it sure felt real to me when I was there, and even in the two visits I've made since then, people have been very, very genuine, no matter what race or whatever, and so it is an experience that I very much appreciated.

Cline

Yes. What did it feel like to return to the WASP-ier climate of Yale after that?

Nakanishi

Well, sophomore year I remember going to live in the residential college. I decided that I would still be a premed or at least take the premed courses and maybe I would major in something else. I didn't know what that something else would be. I remember taking organic chemistry and just really loving it.

And then I squeezed in this course that I had like absolutely no interest in, which was political science. At least in high school, the study of government was like the most boring thing you could do. And yet, this class was a class on a model U.N. [United Nations], or was on the U.N., and it was run like--high school kids have these model U.N. programs in which, aside from kind of learning the theory and so forth of how the international organizations work, that everyone represented a country. And I remember taking Mexico. Why wouldn't I, right, coming from East L.A.?

Cline

Yes, right.

Nakanishi

And having to write three very long papers on the cultural relations of Mexico, the economic relations of Mexico, and the international political relations of Mexico. I think it was when I had come back after the Idabel experience, I went to one of these summer welcoming parties for new kids for all Ivy League schools, and that's when I first met a guy who would eventually become a lifelong friend, Carlos Moreno, who was a year ahead of me and who had gone to Lincoln High School in East Los Angeles. Carlos was Mexican American, and we would do many things together, both in terms of our academics as well as our extracurricular. Carlos is currently on the California Supreme Court, the only Democrat on the Supreme

Court, and I've been very good friends with Carlos ever since that summer.

In this model U.N. class, the guy who decides to take on the U.S., become the U.S. representative, is a guy named Joaquin Avila. Joaquin Avila is Mexican American. He's a year ahead of me. He's from Compton, California, and I mean, we become good friends, and he tries to buy me out when we had these sessions, right, because he's the powerful U.S. and so forth. I would eventually find out that Carlos and Joaquin were two of three Mexican Americans in the class before me, and the third was a guy named George something [Lopez], from Texas, but just those three.

So Joaquin sometime during that course during first semester tells me, "I'm getting a few guys together to go and picket and to put out some literature on the grape boycott. Would you be interested in coming?" And I said, "Sure." I mean, I knew a little bit about that. He knew Carlos, and so there were like four or five of us who went to a local supermarket. We passed out literature and so forth, and it called for boycotting grapes and kind of gave the story of the [United] Farm Workers [Union] here and so forth, and that was, in some ways, the kind of start of doing some things with the Mexican American community.

[unclear] taking this model U.N. class, really liking it, because, I mean, it's different from high school, and I really liked the professor, really like what I'm doing. I still like organic chemistry, but this poly-sci stuff kind of seems interesting.

I also decide at that time that what I'd really like to do is possibly an independent study--and to find a major that would let me do this--that would allow me to look at Japanese Americans in the context of U.S.-Japan relations, okay? So this was all evolved from that December seventh issue. I remember seeing my dean, and my dean said, "Well, maybe you ought to go to Asian Studies." So I remember going to Asian Studies and meeting with the director of Asian Studies, and he asked me, "Well, are you fluent in Japanese?" And I said, "Well, sort of. I mean, I grew up speaking Japanese. I've gone to Japanese school for twelve years," and so forth. And he tells me--and he's some anthropology prof, and he says, "You know, if you know the language, don't major in Asian language or Japanese studies, because that's what the bulk of the major is about. It's learning the language, because most people don't know

and it takes a long time to learn it. And since you're here at Yale, explore. Take something else."

So I remember going back to my dean, and he said, "Well, why don't you go and see this professor I met, a very interesting guy. He's in sociology." And I remember going to the office of Rodolfo Alvarez, Rudy Alvarez, who was a Mexican American, the only Mexican American faculty member, assistant prof, and he's in sociology. He happened to invite me into his room when he had this other student, and this other student like was going after him for being such a lousy lecturer or something. So I felt bad being in the room. So the guy leaves, and Rudy says, "Well, I'm sorry you had that introduction to me, but what can I do to help you?" So I told him that I had spoken to dean so-and-so and that he had recommended that I speak to you, and I'm really interested in finding a major that will allow me to further explore this issue of sort of Japanese Americans kind of being caught in U.S.-Japan relations. I mean, he was very, very nice and so forth to me, and he says--and it's interesting how sociology and so forth evolves from the way he was thinking then, which was probably how most sociologists were thinking at that time, and some probably still do, but one that sociology really didn't study international events, okay, that their focus was largely domestic. It dealt largely with society, and possibly they looked at immigration, but what I was more interested in was international relations, so sociology wasn't the right thing.

And then he says that--I guess I sort of asked him, "Do you study Mexican Americans?" Because I found out that he was from Texas and so forth. And he says, "No. And the reason I don't is because you lose all objectivity by studying your own group." So he didn't see any--I mean, from the kind of rigid, methodological way he was looking at these things, that he couldn't see how you could possibly study your own group and to kind of be successful as a sociologist and to be well regarded and so forth. That's when he said maybe political science or whatever. So I said, gee, I am taking a poly-sci class, right.

And I remember that when I was looking at "Prejudice, War, and the Constitution," and I'm sure I read it again, that in the foreword they talked about the help that they had received from this professor at Yale Law School, a guy named Harold Laswell, and that

Laswell had provided some guidance and so forth. So like any ambitious Yale student, I looked up his name and I called him up. I said, "Professor Laswell, my name's Don Nakanishi," and so forth. "I'm a sophomore, and I saw your name in this book, and I'm interested in doing a topic that I think maybe you could help me on."

So I remember going to the law school, and he had a room, it must have been, well, this particular room let's say, four times bigger than this room, and it was like bookcase after bookcase. And it took me like two or three minutes to find this guy; he's way in the back. He's this old guy in glasses and so forth, wearing a suit. So I explained to him what I am interested in doing, and he says, "Well, I'd be happy to help you. Have you considered being an intensive poly-sci major?" I said, "No, but what does that mean?" And he said, "Well, it means that you could do independent research under a professor. So you go and talk to so-and-so, professor so-and-so, director of undergraduate studies, and you tell him that Professor Laswell is willing to be your advisor, and we can begin talking," and so forth.

So I remember a few days later I go talk to this guy, and I'm telling him what I'm interested in, and I could tell he's not particularly--I mean, poly-sci is not a field that's really attuned with race and ethnic relations and stuff like that, and in particular, I'm sure, Asian Americans at that time. But I said that, "I just saw Professor Laswell, and he's willing to be my advisor." End of conversation. "You're in the major," and so forth. So it's only afterwards, right, because I had only taken this one class, that I find out that Harold Laswell is viewed as the father of modern political science, and he's the one who kind of introduces psychology, all kinds of things, into the study of politics, and just is this brilliant man, and he's going to be my advisor. So that's how eventually I get into poly-sci. I mean, I could have easily been a sociology major or whatever.

Second semester sophomore year, Joaquin and I met someplace, on the street or something, and Joaquin says, "I'm thinking of forming an organization for Mexican American students, and we're going to have our first meeting. Would you be interested in coming?" or something, right? And I said, "Sure. I'm free, and I'll come." I also say, "Do you know Professor Alvarez? I just met this professor in sociology." He said he didn't, so he said, "Well, maybe we should

invite him." So we had our first meeting, and when you added up the freshmen Chicanos, then me and we only had one Chicano in my class, a guy named Manny Perez from L.A., and then the three who were a year ahead of us, and there were none above that, I don't know, there were like nine, ten, eleven, I don't know, guys. We met, and we essentially saw, I mean, kind of knew the agenda for the Black Students Association, right, and I guess it was the first semester of our freshman year when the black students at Yale had proposed African American Studies at Yale. And Yale had this unbelievably benevolent and liberal administration, and so they call their contacts at the Ford Foundation and because it's Yale--I mean, all the other Ivy League schools are resisting African American studies, okay. Cornell [University] has this incident where guys are coming out with rifles from a [unclear]. There's a picture of that. And Harvard [University], the president there is this reactionary. Columbia [University] had had their big strike, and then the reaction here at San Francisco State and at [University of California] Berkeley was, and let alone UCLA was not terribly favorable. But Yale had--and so this was Yale saying it wanted to do something in African American Studies, and so Ford gives them this huge grant to like recruit some more faculty, because it is connected with that faculty issue and so forth, and to develop courses, have a national conference on this topic, you know, is there legitimacy to this, is there enough research, all that stuff.

So I'm sure Joaquin in his head is saying, god, why can't we have a class, and why aren't we involved with admissions? I mean, he'd been the guy doing the grape boycott and everything. So we have our first meeting, and I think every Chicano at that time, plus me, and plus Professor Alvarez, attends this meeting, and we talk and we brainstorm about different issues, and so we have this kind of agenda, right? And one was going to be to develop a course, and so we're lucky, we have this professor. And luckily he wasn't thinking research, but at least teaching, he wouldn't mind being our instructor of record or whatever. And admissions, we were kind of too late to play that big of a role, but we said, we ought to go and talk with the admissions people, and we ought to tell them, we want to go and recruit students just like the African American students are doing. So we want to go back to the barrios and everything else, right? And we find this very receptive group of administrators,

right, I mean admissions people. Then we go to the dean of students and we said, "We want to have a conference, a student conference for all the Chicanos on the East Coast." Not many, but-- and other things.

That's how this organization--the first name of the group was Los Hermanos, and that lasted maybe for a month before they adopted the name of the student groups here in California, which was UMAS. That stood for United Mexican American Students. Then about a half year later, UMAS becomes even more radicalized, and they adopt the name MECHA, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlan, okay? And so we also adopt that, right?

And I remember one of the first two actions that we took. One was, the Yale student-run radio station was going to have a "greaser" night. But their idea of greaser night was East Coast kind of greasers, right?

Cline

Yes. Hmm.

Nakanishi

That didn't sit well with Joaquin and Carlos and several others. So they went and stormed the radio station and told them they had to quit and everything. It was a big ruckus, and it gets reported in the "Yale Daily News." But luckily, we had this liberal dean of students, who recognized, I mean, some insensitivity here, so he didn't do anything.

Then the second thing was, we caught wind of--well, we learned of who got admitted to the following freshman class, and this was going to be the class that would enter in the fall of 1969, and this would be a freshman class that not only had two hundred and fifty women, but also there would be two hundred and fifty sophomores and two hundred and fifty juniors, okay. And we learned that there were no Chicanas that were admitted as juniors or sophomores, but that there was one who was on a waiting list for the freshman class. So that was the other thing we advocated for, was for her to get off waiting list and to be admitted. Her name was Rosanna Anaya, from Sacred Heart High School in Lincoln Heights here. And eventually there were enough, whatever, rejections to open up some spots, and she was admitted, and she was the very first Chicana.

We were given some money for the summer after my sophomore year, to go to Texas or to fly home, basically, but to go and recruit

at various high schools, so we went to a lot of schools in East Los Angeles and so forth, and I went with Carlos. So that was sort of my Mexican American experience.

Joaquin Avila eventually goes to Harvard Law School, and we're there around the same time I'm in grad school, and Joaquin becomes one of the most renowned voting-rights experts. He was the general counsel for MALDEF [Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund] for many years in Texas, and he'd win all these cases against sort of at-large city councils, which everybody in El Paso votes for everybody on the city council, which kind of made it impossible for Mexican Americans to be elected. So he created all these district whatevers, city councils, and was involved in all the kind of redistricting things that happened there, and played a major role in terms of Chicano electoral success. He was probably the lead attorney when L.A. County also went through its thing and eventually leads to the election of Gloria Molina. Joaquin eventually becomes president of MALDEF, didn't last very long at that, and he also was a MacArthur [Fellowship] "genius" [grant] fellow, and he's a law prof right now at University of Seattle Law School.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

It was in the summer after my sophomore year, when this Japanese American guy that I had met in high school, named Alan Kumamoto--and Alan was the executive director of a group in Little Tokyo called the Japanese American Community Services. He calls me up and he says, "I know this guy who's going to start grad school in psychology at Yale, and would you be willing to come down and to meet him and to kind of tell him how Yale's all about?" and so forth. So I said, "Sure." So I go down and I meet this guy. His name is Glenn Omatsu. He had been raised in Montebello, working-class family and so forth, gone to East L.A. College and then went to [University of California] Santa Cruz, and at Santa Cruz he had been very much involved in the Asian American student movement, and they were very active in giving support to the San Francisco State strike and so forth.

So Glenn was very, very much involved, very knowledgeable, very much radicalized, I mean, as Asian American student politics. So I meet him and I'm telling him about Yale and so forth, and he asked

me, "What are some things that you do?" So I tell him I'm involved with this Mexican American group, and we just finished going to these various high schools before they let out for the summer, trying to introduce Yale and recruiting students and so forth, and that we had been involved with the grape boycott and all this. So Glenn then asks me, "Are the Asian American students organized at Yale?" And I remember thinking about it for a few seconds and then saying, "Well, that's a really interesting idea." I said, "If you'd like to do that, I'll do everything to help you."

So when we go back in the fall, I kind of introduce this idea to a few other Asian Americans, particularly in my class, who might be interested, and they seem to be, I mean, because, clearly, a lot of things were happening in terms of race relations and racial identity and ethnic identity and so forth around that time. So we decide, just like what the Chicano students had done, that we would meet over a meal. We would call a dinner. And so to find out, we would go through the student telephone directory, and we would try to identify all the Asian Americans by their surnames. And we were wrong on some of them, right? Lees.

Cline

Yes, right.

Nakanishi

And then there was, I think, one or two African names that we picked up, but they're nice enough to say, "I'm African, but good luck," or something. We counted fifty-nine students, and thirty-five of them met in my college, in Saybrook College. We first met in this sort of reception area and then we all kind of not marched, not literally marched, but walked into the dining room together, and you could see everybody kind of looking around. I mean, this was like the first time thirty-five Asian Americans had kind of come together, and it probably was surprising for some of the students themselves, I mean some of the Asian American students to kind of see this reaction too, because I mean, just like in some ways the diversity of the Yale student body, the Asian Americans were diverse, and even though my class may have been just from Hawaii and California, there are Asians from the South, from other parts of New York, from the Midwest, from Washington, Oregon, you name it, right. So some kids grew up with whites, others grew up in minority communities, whatever.

So we got together in this kind of private dining room outside of the main dining area. No, did we do that? No. We first ate that dinner together, then we met in this private area, and I basically told them what the Mexican American students had done, which, of course, was what the African American students had done before that. This was a remarkably talented and eventually very, very committed group of students, and it probably also helped that this was the first group that was coed, right? We had maybe out of the fifty-nine students, maybe twenty were women, so very different from the Chicano group that only had one, right, and there were, I don't know, about six or seven in my class, the junior class.

So we divided up the kind of tasks, and somebody was interested in doing a film series, somebody was interested in working on admissions, somebody--so forth. But one of the immediate things that we worked on was to try to get signatures in support of what was called the repeal of Title 2 of the 1950 McCarran Act. This particular act was patterned after what had happened to Japanese Americans, and it allowed the federal government to round up people who were a threat to the government and put them into concentration camps, and the Japanese American community was beginning to mobilize around that. Before that, it was this very, very small group of constitutional-law profs and students, led, actually, by a prof at Yale Law School.

So we decided we would--because of the way Yale was structured, right, I mean, twelve residential colleges. Everyone went to their own dining rooms and all that. So we decided to go and collect signatures at each of the dining rooms, and we eventually collected three thousand signatures, which actually is pretty remarkable when you consider the entire undergraduate student body was forty-seven fifty, right. So we collected three thousand signatures, and we sent it to U.S. Senator Spark [Masayugi] Matsunaga of Hawaii, and he puts it into the "Congressional Record," and he titles his submission "Yale University Supports Repeal of Title 2." [Cline laughs] So, of course, we feel great, but we got all this national publicity too. But that was the first thing that we worked on. We also worked on developing the first class and all these other things. I remember going to the admissions office with ten other people, and the admissions director saying, "Weren't you here last

year?" We went to the dean of students and said, "Weren't you here?"

Cline

What did you guys call yourselves?

Nakanishi

The Asian American Students Association, and a lot of remarkable things.

Cline

Right. And we'll continue in our next session. I have one more really quick question for you. Why were you taking Russian in your first year?

Nakanishi

I wanted to be linguistically fluent in Russian because of the Russian immigrants in Boyle Heights, because my ambition was to become a doctor and come back to Boyle Heights, and we had some Russian immigrants who were still there, and I thought I was fluent in Spanish, I thought I was fluent in Japanese, but you lose so much of it when you don't--but the other was that as a premed at that time, you had to be fluent, or not fluent, you had to take at least a year or two of Russian, German, or French. Those were the only three languages that were acceptable. It's this old notion that those were the only foreign languages that had any kind of scientific history to them, and that was the only reason why you learned a language, to read journals or whatever. So that's why I was in Russian; complete mistake.

Cline

I see. Okay. Well, thank you for today, and we'll continue the Yale saga next time.

Nakanishi

Okay.

1.5. Session 5 (February 2, 2010)

Cline

This is Alex Cline interviewing Professor Don Nakanishi. Today is February 2, 2010. We're in his soon-to-be-relinquished office in the Education Building here at UCLA, Moore Hall, and this is our fifth session.

Good morning.

Nakanishi

Morning.

Cline

It's a little more reverberant in here than the last time we spoke. One thing I wanted to ask you as we continue into your Yale [University] years here, by way of not only following up from last time, but kind of continuing the path that we were forging at the end of our session last time with the founding of the Asian American Students Association at Yale and everything associated with that. You had talked about when you were in high school, for example, you were the boy mayor of Los Angeles, and you unwittingly came out with kind of a supportive statement when asked in favor or in support of Sam Yorty's gubernatorial aspirations.

And yet, clearly, as we head in to the Yale years, you're surrounded by a couple of roommates who are decidedly very conservative politically. But we talked about your VISTA experience last time, we talked about the response to the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert [F.] Kennedy, and consequently we're starting to get a picture of your developing point of view, shall we say. I wondered if you could sort of explain or chronicle how that particular point of view began to develop, particularly because we're in this very kind of pivotal time, culturally and politically, in the history of the country and of the world, which is the late sixties moving into the early seventies. How did you start to sort of increase your awareness and become more, not only active, but just have a more decidedly defined point of view, politically and socially?

Nakanishi

Well, I think, actually, my freshmen roommates, Jeff Krauss and Larry Uzzel, and particularly Larry Uzzel, may have had some influence on that, perhaps indirectly.

I remember joining the Yale Political Union, which has been around for decades, and it's sort of, I shouldn't say a forum, it's an organization that brings sort of renowned political leaders, at that time and still does now, political leaders to campus, of all different political persuasions. They come and speak, and the members of the organization, obviously, have these forums or whatever, attract two, three hundred people, and ask questions and so forth. It's something that most of the really well-known political leaders that have come out of Yale, like John Kerry I think was president of the

political union--I'm sure Howard Dean, who was in my class, was involved.

So not only do they bring speakers on campus, but they also are divided into all of the different sort of political persuasions, from the party on the right, which is where Larry Uzzel was, to a conservative party, to a Republican Party club, which actually did not attract very many people, and then there was a Democratic or--yes, I don't think there was a moderate club--there was a Democratic club, which also didn't quite attract people, and then at least a party on the left. I don't know if there was something in between Democrats and the Left.

Nakanishi

I remember initially joining the party on the left before coming to Yale, because I signed up for it and so forth, or I signed up for the Democratic. I remember Larry was very, very active with the party on the right. He was the one who initiated an invitation to Bill [William F.] Buckley to come and speak to the Political Union, and Bill Buckley was a Yale alumnus and so forth, even spent some time in our living room before he spoke. I don't know if Larry was just trying to be either nice or trying to recruit me into the party of the right, but he would invite me and Jeff to different events of the party of the right, and they clearly had more fun than the people on the left.

Cline

Really.

Nakanishi

I just remember, yes, going to places like Mory's, which is this famous sort of drinking and eating place, sort of a private club at Yale in New Haven. Yes, they just seemed to have more fun. I mean, I think they took their politics just as seriously, and in contrast to either the Democratic or the party of the left, and I also attended a couple of their meetings, like I said, I think they were simply having a little more fun.

So I think that there was something there, I mean to the Political Union and to seeing this whole political spectrum, and to sort of ask myself, where do I sort of stand in relation to that? Obviously, I wasn't identifying with at least the Republican Party or the party of the right initially. Then I think during my freshman year, with things like the assassination of Martin Luther King, with the assassination

of Bobby Kennedy, and then with the VISTA experience, I think I was clearly drifting much more towards the liberal side.

I think it was my second, actually, political science course that I took--my first one was sort of this international organizations, model U.N. kind of course. But the second one was a class on political philosophy, and it sort of went from Plato and Aristotle all the way to [Karl] Marx and [Emmanuel] Kant, and that's where you sort of learned some things about at least the traditional or classical definitions of liberal and conservative and so forth. So I think all of that had something to do with it.

And then I think just my awareness and interest in issues dealing with race relations was, clearly, steering me much more towards the Left. I think even by the end of my sophomore year, I hadn't really read, I mean, all that much, either the Old Left, the New Left, or I think even at that stage I had not read--maybe it wasn't even out--"The Autobiography of Malcolm X." But, clearly, starting junior year, starting with my friendship with Glenn Omatsu, who was far more ideological than I was and far more left than I was and probably would ever be, but I think it was through that experience and through taking certain courses and doing the reading for them and writing certain papers that, boy, I started reading everything I could, dealing with particularly African Americans, with new things that were coming out by the New Left, the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] folks, the Abbie Hoffmans, and that also just steered me towards looking at stuff with the Old Left, from the fifties and so forth.

So I read a whole lot, and I was also reading a lot of the different, sort of current newspapers of all the different groups. And so even though there wasn't--we're talking about sort of the beginning stages of Chicano Studies and Asian American Studies and then to a certain extent the kind of newer version of African American Studies, that I would get exposed to a lot of different political thinking through reading newspapers. One from L.A. was "La Raza." There was an Asian American newspaper that actually evolved from the [UCLA] Asian American Studies Center folks, with some Long Beach [State] folks, called "Gidra," and there were some other publications that I was reading.

I also remember that the Asian American Students Association, as well as the Chicano organization, which by that time was called

UMAS, and maybe it had actually evolved into MEChA by then, were successful in getting the first courses in Chicano Studies and Asian American Studies approved. And I remember it was my second semester of my junior year, when I took four courses. One was on the history of the African American political movement or social movement, civil rights and so forth, which was very interesting because it sort of provided this history from--and rebellions and so forth at the time of slavery, all the way to the current Civil Rights Movement. The class was really set at sort of the national level, and so we were talking about kind of national events, national levels, sort of movements and so forth.

Then the Chicano Studies class, which was taught by Professor Rodolfo Alvarez, who I talked about last time, and I might add that after our senior year, that Rudy was selected to be the director of the Chicano Studies Research Center here at UCLA, and came here and survived for I think two years before there was sort of an internal rebellion and he was forced to resign. But nonetheless, Rudy taught this course, and it was a seminar with all the Chicanos and me, so there were like twelve or so, and the class was sort of pitted at the community level, right? So we're talking about the importance of the Catholic Church, about certain types of community organizations, about the economy of communities and so forth, okay. So we're talking about some, obviously, federal laws, immigration laws and all that other stuff, but still, most of the stuff was sort of centered on communities, and maybe that was intentional because of Rudy's kind of expertise or interest in sociology and looking at social structure and all that stuff. He was a big guy in terms of organizational theory, and so studying the church and how the church functioned and the impact that had on a community may have been something that he was particularly interested in.

And then the Asian American Studies class, which I also took, and it was the first time it was offered, and our sponsor was Professor Chitoshi Yanaga. He was the very first Japanese American to get a tenured position at Yale. Chitoshi had been born and raised in Hawaii. I don't know where he got--well, I do know where he got his degree, I think. I'm pretty sure he got his doctorate from UC [University of California] Berkeley, because I recall that he once told us a story about how he and his wife could not live in certain parts

of Berkeley, because they didn't allow Japanese Americans to live in certain parts of Berkeley.

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

So this was sometime after World War II. And Chitoshi was an expert in Japanese politics, but Chitoshi was a faculty member in my college, Saybrook College, and I got to be very good friends with him. He was very, very sympathetic to what we were doing, and so, basically, let us design this course.

We also had a very strong supporter in this woman named Mary Rouse, who was a Japanese American, second-generation Japanese American like Chitoshi, but she had been born and raised in Alaska, of all places. I guess her family had gone there, her father being a fisherman or something, and had settled there. She came to Yale before World War II, and her identity was so jumbled that she decided to specialize in China, and so she became a China expert and studied Chinese at Yale for her doctorate, and she eventually married this guy--I forget Rouse's first name [Irving], but he was like one of the real pioneers of sort of modern--or of anthropology, I should say, just the field, because anthro is a fairly young field relative to the others like sociology and poly-sci and so forth. Rouse was a long, long-time professor at Yale and had gone to Yale as an undergrad and a grad student, and they got married, I think, sometime after World War II. She was never removed and incarcerated in concentration camps, because she was in the East Coast and she was in New Haven. But she was also very, very supportive of this student organization and supportive of the class that we had designed.

Well, the class that we designed--and maybe this kind of reflects both the state of the literature, but really the designers of the class and what they wanted out of the class--had a very, very heavy emphasis on the individual, right? So questions of identity, right, and psychological issues and all that, which was sort of absent from the other two classes on Chicanos and African Americans.

Then the fourth class I took was this one for the intensive political science major, and it counted twice, and by that stage the project that I wanted to work on for my senior thesis was to go and look at the so-called Third World Liberation Front, which was this coalition

of all of the different racial groups in the Bay Area. I was curious to understand, I mean, how the different groups worked together, how they strategized about their agenda and their strategies and so forth. I read all this stuff in political science about coalition building and so forth. I got a grant to go and spend the summer up in Berkeley and to go and do participant observation, to interview and so forth. And then when I got there, the whole coalition fell apart. So that defied all of the stuff that I'd read, right, about political coalitions, social coalitions, everything.

So then I really had to go and revise my study and to really figure out why it was that the coalition broke apart, and that was kind of interesting. But, obviously, by that stage, by sometime in my junior year, I kind of knew something a little bit more sophisticated about political ideology and so forth and sort of where I stood and so forth.

I also remember--and Carlos [Moreno] actually said he has kept this and would give me a Xerox copy of it, but Carlos Moreno is one of my best friends, and I forget if I've mentioned him already. He's currently on the California Supreme Court. Carlos and I both took the Chicano Studies and the Asian American class, and Carlos was the only non-Asian American in this class, right. And it was a little bigger class than the Chicano Studies class, but it had maybe twenty-five people, and it was largely taught by students, with Yanaga there all the time, but nonetheless sort of taught by students, and we kind of ran it like a seminar and so forth.

We asked both Yanaga and Professor Alvarez if we could write a joint paper, that would count for both classes' final paper, in which we would write to one another, okay, so it's like an e-mail exchange, but at that time it was a little more sophisticated than that. So we would ask each other questions and then we would, whatever, respond with four or five pages of commentary or something. Then maybe he would respond to that and then talk about something and raise a question or whatever. And we did this for the whole semester. It's something like 150 pages, and I didn't keep a copy, or at least I couldn't find one yet. Maybe it's at my home somewhere. But Carlos says he's kept it, and he is going to give me a copy of it, okay? But I'm sure in there we also talked about where we stood politically, where we stood on issues of race and so forth.

The other thing that happened--both groups, MEChA as well as AASA, did things like admissions, the courses, took up various kinds of issues like the grape boycott or the Title 2, we both had like film series, and we also both put on the very, very first conferences for our groups or communities, for students in the East Coast. So the very first Chicano student conference was held at Yale, organized by this group, and the very first Asian American student conference, which was held in March of 1970, my junior year, was also held at Yale. It attracted four hundred students from something like thirty different colleges on the East Coast, a lot of these kids just coming by themselves, and then you had much larger contingents like from New York schools, like City College of New York and Hunter [College] and so forth.

The other kind of memorable thing that happened in 1970 and in that sort of second semester, when I was taking these courses, was the big controversy over whether Bobby Seale, who was a Black Panther, and he was accused of murder--somebody in New Haven, an informer or somebody. The trial was going to take place in New Haven, in the New Haven federal courts, which is sort of right next to the Yale campus. Many groups on the left, as well as many groups of color, were going to come on May Day of 1970 to Yale, during the weekend, to have this huge protest, okay? And people wondered what would Yale's response be, right? I mean, would it just kind of close its doors? What would it do?

I think I had mentioned that we had a very, very liberal administration, and it was led by the president at that time, a guy named Kingman Brewster, who was a former law professor at Harvard [University]. He was a Yale undergrad and everything, very liberal and very politically astute. So reporters would come and ask him, "What's Yale going to do?" and so forth, and he basically said, "Yale's going to open its doors. It's going to provide," whatever, "restroom facilities, water, so forth. Some of the students may want to house some of the participants," and all that, but Yale is not going to stand in the way of all the progressive people that were going to come and become a target in themselves, be kind of aligned.

Then I don't know if Brewster just said this on his own, or whether it was in response to a question. It very well could have been in response to a question. But he made the statement that he did not

think a black revolutionary could get a fair trial in America, and, of course, that angered all kinds of people, including the alumni, who were already upset that Yale had become coed, many of them, right, and that started my junior year. But that whole debate had started my freshman year. But he makes this statement that he doesn't think a black revolutionary could get a fair trial, and, of course, that's what most Yale students wanted to hear, I think, the more politically active ones, at that time.

I still remember watching these news reports of--the federal government was not going to just stand around and sell all these people come in and possibly have a huge, violent kind of demonstration. So they had the National Guard, I mean several thousand National Guard lined up in the suburbs.

Cline

Right. Of course.

Nakanishi

They brought in ten tanks, and they were ready to disperse the crowd or to have a fight or whatever it was. Then I remember there was this news report on the Wednesday or Thursday approaching that weekend, when they said that a whole truckload of rifles had been hijacked just outside of New Haven, because I forget if it was the Winchester [Repeating Arms Company] gun company or whatever was located in New Haven, and so it was one of their shipments got hijacked or something. And whether that was true or not, I mean, that kind of intensified things.

I remember all the groups at that time decided to do something, okay, and for the Asian American group, it meant going out to the New Haven community, and there were possibly ten small businesses--Chinese restaurants; there was a sort of combination grocery store/gift store; there were a couple of laundries--and we asked them whether they would like their windows boarded up, just like most of the businesses in New Haven were being boarded up. Almost all of them appreciated the gesture, and so there was a group of members that did that.

Then I remember the different groups coming together and saying, "We've got to issue a statement." So the Black Students Association at Yale issued a statement, UMAS or MEChA issued a statement, and the Asian Americans issued a statement, and then there was a collective statement.

Our statement was written--and Bill [Lann Lee] says, this is a pivotal moment in his life--but it was written by Bill Lann Lee, who was a member of my class and a just brilliant guy, who was from Bronx School of Science, and who had grown up in Harlem. His father had a laundry. His father had been a World War II veteran, but he had been an immigrant, and Bill was Chinese American and so forth. And Bill kind of used both his intellect, his politics, and his kind of background to write this kind of amazing statement, sort of why Asian Americans were in support of a fair trial, and why we thought Bobby Seale should be let go.

Bill Lann Lee graduates from Yale Phi Beta Kappa. He decides to go to Columbia Law School, because he wants to be back in New York, and he eventually, I think after second year or whatever there, works for--what's [Jack] Greenberg's first name? I forget Greenberg's first name--but a very, very famous civil rights attorney who is the head lawyer for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] Legal Defense and Education Fund, and that's the start of Bill's career in civil rights work. Bill was tapped by Bill Clinton to be the assistant attorney general for civil rights, which is sort of the chief civil rights position in the U.S., and Bill kind of attributes a lot of his involvement--he worked for NAACP for many, many years--to that one experience. So we had some very, very talented people, and there were just a lot of events that kept going on. I mean, my freshman year was pivotal, but sophomore and junior year, both the combination of my studying things, being interested in studying them, as well as just the times that we were in and kind of issues that we had to take some position on, even at a place like Yale, so I think all of that was beginning to have some impact on my political thinking.

Cline

Yes. It's interesting that you walked right into the Black Panther issue, because what I was waiting to ask was how it was for you and people in your group to encounter what at that time was essentially a revolutionary point of view, highly controversial, leading to this Bobby Seale thing happening right in your own backyard, and I didn't have to ask it. But I was curious to know what your--especially as you want to study this group in Berkeley, and you're from Yale. I don't know how clear this is now, looking back on it, but what, if any, kind of gap was there in terms of how

you as an academic, a young student, were viewed by people who were basically kind of just in the community, in these essentially kind of grassroots organizations, maybe even with a revolutionary point of view, a lot of angry people, a lot of people with passions running high, and also with a connection to a lot of counterculture sort of activity that's going on in the country and in the world at that point. I don't know how involved you were in any of that personally, but what was that relationship like for you? Was there a gap, or was it basically that--was your point of view welcomed, because it was sympathetic?

Nakanishi

Well, in some ways, I mean, I had some credentials too. I mean, I wasn't just an uninformed or uninvolved sort of researcher kind of coming in and poking my nose, I mean because I had been involved with groups, I had done a lot of reading, and then in kind of a strange way, I mean, being from New Haven and Yale was not kind of a bad credential to have at that moment. I was very clear in terms of what it was that I was studying. I mean, I wasn't trying to pass myself off as something else.

Cline

Right. And you weren't from the dominant culture either, which had to help.

Nakanishi

Yes, and so I found a lot of people who were willing to talk with me, and I would go to their different events. I remember the first couple of times I would be part of a march and then to see the police start to go after the marchers, and I was like, oh, no, man, I don't want to get arrested, or I don't want to get beaten up or whatever. But luckily, that never happened.

I also had another advisor at Yale, a guy named Abdul Jeloh, who was an assistant prof. He was from I forget what country in Africa, but he had gotten his Ph.D. in political science from Berkeley. He had just come to Yale, and I had just taken a class with him. So I remember telling him what I was interested in doing, and so he gave me some referrals, and, I mean, that's how I got this one that was very, very instrumental, a guy named Herman Blake, who was a professor at UC [University of California] Santa Cruz, who happened to have also known Glenn Omatsu. But Herman Blake kind of knew all the different players, particularly in the African

American community, so I mean, that also helped, that I had sort of introductions also from various people.

So I mean, in terms of data collection and all that, I mean--and maybe I also--I just don't remember fully, but it could very well be that I understood my boundaries. If they didn't want to tell me, if they didn't want to have me participate in something, whether it was a meeting or a march or something, that was okay with me, and I would respect that. It was enough for me to try to cover-- eventually, I identified ten different groups to kind of keep track of. Did I talk about "Amerasia [Journal]"?

Cline

No, not yet. We can get to that. Before we leave this, I just wanted to ask--one of the things I was curious to get at, which you did mention, is if you were ever kind of putting yourself in the way of danger to any degree, especially considering that starting especially around 1969, a lot of these student demonstrations and things are getting very violent. There's a lot of anger going on. There's a lot of burning of buildings. There's a lot of military presence, students getting hurt, even killed. There's Kent State [University]. There's all these things going on, and I just wondered, personally, what your feeling was about what was happening, just as an individual, not to mention what was happening in terms of just generally in terms of the counterculture at that point; how much of a sort of objective observer point of view you may have been trying to adopt, or maybe more as a participant involved in it, you were trying to engage in--if there was any distinction there at all.

Nakanishi

Well, personally, I was afraid of the police. In some ways, it kind of reinforced some very, very early experiences in high school. I mean, when I would drive with--not so much when we were cruising Whittier Boulevard, but I do remember when I would pick up some friends, particularly at Garfield High School, some old junior high school friends, and whether it was late at night or something, and to drive into Monterey Park and to be stopped, because here was a carload of kids, right, I mean, kids of color. At that stage, Monterey Park, I mean, did not have very many either Asians or Chicanos living there, and I had this very, very negative view of some of the sheriffs and the Monterey Park police for many, many years.

And so, you know, I don't know, when you see a whole line of helmeted police kind of coming after you, I mean, it's kind of scary, and so, I mean, I was not going to be one that's going to take the punishment. I mean, I was going to make sure to try to get away from all of that. I was fortunate not to have gotten beaten up. I was not one that was terribly sympathetic to violence, even on our part, namely the protestors or whatever.

I forget who I had this conversation with, but it was sometime junior or senior year, and I remember I was in New York, where I would used to go many times to either go to marches or to go to meetings of these different Asian American kind of Left groups. And somebody said, "Shinya said, the best thing that could happen--." I don't know, I sort of recall this conversation happening on a bus, so maybe the bus was going to a march or something, an antiwar march in [Washington] D.C. or something. The person said, "Shinya thinks that the best thing that could happen to radicalize Asian Americans would be if there was an armed fight with the police, and the police were to kill ten Asian American protestors." And I said, "Man, that's crazy." Maybe I put myself in that role of being one of those who was going to be killed.

But this was Shinya Ono, who was the younger brother of Yoko Ono, who had come to New York and who had been one of the members of Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] at Columbia. Shin'yo is one of those that was more on really the real left, and there are a number of Asian Americans, particularly in New York initially, before they kind of got into the Asian American thing, who were part of white-Left kind of groups, and particularly had participated in the Columbia protests. And, in fact, my roommates for the first two years at--or one of my two roommates my first two years at Harvard, when they went to Tufts Medical School and I went to Harvard, and we lived in Boston near Chinatown, which is where Tufts Medical School is located, one of them had been an SDS member and then had become more of an Asian American. I still remember another guy, Michio Kaku, who at that time was kind of very, very much involved with white-Leftist activities, and he was an assistant prof in physics at City College of New York. He had gone to Harvard undergrad and grad school. He had come from Palo Alto, I think. I don't know what his folks did. But Michio has since become this very, very well-known author and sort of TV

commentator about science, and I think he's still a professor at City College.

Cline

Interesting.

Nakanishi

I studied the white New Left movement, as well as the old one, and I read a lot of their stuff, but to me, my preference was really more towards identifying with groups on the Left, and maybe we were like really overly sensitive at times, but I still recall like conversations in which--for example, a big march on Washington, D.C., an antiwar march. I forget where we were placed, but I remember that if we were placed at the beginning, at the front of the march, people were really pretty upset, because they thought that the white antiwar movement organizers had put us up in front kind of as tokenism and all the symbolic stuff, right? And then if they didn't do that and they put us instead in the back, then we would say they're neglecting us, right? And so I think there was a lot of suspicion about working relations between the whites and progressives and progressives of color.

Then all that counterculture stuff, I mean, I just thought the whole country was going crazy, I mean, and everything was fluid. They were clearly there in San Francisco when I was there during the summer, I mean in Haight-Ashbury and so forth, and, clearly, their fashions and everything else had an impact, and whether it was the tie-dye shirts, the long hair, whatever, I mean, and it was, I think, only later that I began to make some sense of what was happening. And one of my mentors when I was in grad school was actually a professor from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], and he really wanted me to come to MIT for grad school, and I stupidly went to Harvard instead. Because, I mean, he took care of me throughout my--in ways in which no Harvard professor did. He's a guy named Harold [R.] Isaacs. Harold wrote a book called "Idols of the Tribe," in which he talked about how particularly the black sort of movement, not so much the Civil Rights Movement, but the black movement and that many of the things that are being expressed by sort of revolutionaries or those that were close to them in thinking, began to have an impact on the entire country. And in an earlier book called "The New World of Negro Americans," in which he had interviewed some two hundred very, very prominent African

Americans, and he interviewed these people during the fifties, he concluded that if African Americans came to really accept who they were, I mean that they were black and their skin color and all this other stuff, and began to really organize around that concept and so forth, that this whole country would be impacted and would have this tremendous change.

And when I look back at that time period, from when I was in high school through my undergraduate years and some of grad school, and to realize that there was a youth counterculture movement that was going on that was kind of worldwide--the Women's Movement, I mean, really starts to kind of take off around that time, and you have the antiwar movement, you have all different communities of color being impacted by what African Americans were doing and what other groups were doing. I mean, we're all sort of feeding off of one another, so it was just kind of a profound period of change.

Cline

Right. Yes. But you're not premed anymore, obviously, at this point, by the time you're--

Nakanishi

Well, I had taken all my premeds by then. The great thing about Yale is if you have the background, you can take graduate courses in your major, and so my senior year I took nothing but graduate courses in poly-sci, plus I had four classes devoted, four out of the ten courses devoted just to writing my senior thesis. But I should talk a little about "Amerasian Journal."

Cline

Right. But I want you to take us through how you defined and then manifested this interest that you're now pursuing, before you leave Yale, I mean, this shift in direction and what's happening with that.

Nakanishi

"Amerasia Journal" basically evolves from this very first Asian American Studies course. A good friend of mine, named Lowell Chun-Hoon, who's from Hawaii, had gone to Punahou High School--and Lowell was a very, very gifted writer, right. I think he really wanted to be a writer for life if he could, but there are just so many great writers at Yale that, I don't know, he decides he maybe doesn't want to be a writer. We had a guy in our class named William Henry, Bill Henry, who won a Pulitzer Prize like two years after we had graduated. He was the sort of theater critic for the

"Boston Globe" and eventually becomes the theater critic for "Time" magazine by the time he's thirty, and then he passes away like at thirty-five, very, very young.

And we also had like five or six guys who wanted to be president, when I was a freshman. Thankfully, none of them made it. But one of them who obviously did run was--I mean, he didn't have aspirations of becoming president when he was a freshman, but was Howard Dean.

So Lowell wanted to really be a writer, and he was part of the--he had tried out for and had become a member of some of the literary groups and publications at Yale and so forth. We're in this class together, and Lowell says, "What do you think if we maybe started a journal?" And I said, "That's a great idea, because the field needs something like that to develop," and everything. I remember we made this pact that we would each raise five hundred dollars during the summer, and that would be our seed money to, whatever, put out the journal and so forth the following year.

I also remember that we sort of surveyed, I mean, other publications that were similar to what we wanted to do in terms of something like Asian American Studies or contemporary Asian Americans or whatever, and aside from "Gidra" here, there are other kind of newspapers done by youth in San Francisco and New York and so forth. So what we had in mind was different from newspaper journalism kind of stuff, and we caught wind of a publication in New York, done by the Basement Workshop, which was an Asian American arts group in New York Chinatown, and they were thinking of putting out a magazine, kind of a slick magazine--I mean, the cover was slick. They thought they were going to be a "Time" magazine, but it never quite approached that. But nonetheless, a kind of contemporary thing that comes out every month or every other month and would do things maybe a little bit more in depth than a newspaper could, so we knew we didn't have competition there.

And then came up, whatever, this publication called "Bridge" magazine, for many years, until it folded sometime in the eighties. Then we heard that there was a publication that was going to get started by the Red Guard Party, which was the sort of Chinese American or Asian American equivalent of the Black Panther Party in San Francisco, and they were going to put out, quote, "a journal"

called "Aion." I'm not sure what "Aion" stood for, but what they really meant was that it was going to be the size of a journal. It was really going to be a political kind of pamphlet kind of series, and they actually came out with two issues before their editor died in a motorcycle accident, and so they didn't go beyond a couple of issues.

So Lowell really got quite into Asian American stuff through this class, and he applied for this very, very special program that Yale had at that time, called the Scholars of the House, in which you proposed this project, and it could be anything. It could be composing a symphony. It could be doing a science experiment. It could be, like in Lowell's case, doing this psycho-history of the Chinese immigration act, Chinese Exclusion Act. You don't take any courses your senior year, and all you do is you work on this project, and you are given a certain amount of money to travel or whatever, and this group of about twelve people who are selected meet like once a month or whatever, and they kind of talk about their projects or whatever, and you work with, like, one faculty member. So Lowell gets chosen for this, and, well, he's going to have a lot of free time too, right? [laughs] And then I was going to have four classes devoted to my project and everything else, and so, I mean, I still remember my Yale years being those in which I was very, very active. I mean, I was able to balance a lot of things and so to still stay active with AASA and all that other stuff, and other groups, even with MEChA, and yet to even have this idea that we could start a journal and everything. But Lowell had this background in publications. I also had this background in publications, and so we kind of knew what publication looked like, and because we're both kind of into academics and everything, we sort of knew what a journal article looked like and how it was supposed to be kind of different from a journalistic piece or whatever, a magazine piece. Well, we both come back from the summer, and I spent most of my summer up in Berkeley, and Lowell has been back in Hawaii. Lowell's folks were owners of the biggest supermarket in Hawaii at that time, Chun-Hoon's Market. Everybody knew it at that time, and he had kind of connections with particularly the Chinese community there. So Lowell comes back with a thousand dollars, and I come back with nothing. So he has his pick of titles, and so he decides he wants to be the editor. And then what am I? The publisher, the

publisher who didn't raise any money. But I'm the publisher, okay, and that's when we get started, after we returned, to do an "Amerasia."

We issue this call for papers and so forth, through whatever vehicles we had, through ethnic newspapers and so forth, and the first issue basically had three or four pieces by Yale undergraduates, one being by Bill Lann Lee, who writes about this guy, Yung Wing, who is the first Chinese person to graduate from an American college, and that happened to be Yale, sometime in the 1870s. Our cover is designed by a member of our class named Billie Tsien, who had transferred from Pembroke College up at Brown [University], and Billie eventually becomes this renowned architect. Recently she designed the new Asian Library at UC Berkeley.

We also interviewed this activist from Los Angeles, called Warren [T.] Furutani, who now is a member of the California Assembly and so forth, but for many years was an activist who used to go around the country going to colleges, a very, very good speaker, and he would be all these different groups to come and speak and speak about, what is this Asian American stuff, and so forth.

We came out with the very first issue in January or February of 1971, and we essentially gave it out for free and used various mailing lists and so forth, and then we produced another one. It was around that time--because I knew the people here at UCLA who had started the Asian American Studies Center. They had proposed it in 1969 and had begun to, whatever, have an office and everything by 1970, and I had come to visit them on occasion. The assistant or the associate director at that time, or the acting director, a guy named Alan Nishio, asked me during my senior year whether I would be interested in coming into the center and becoming the assistant director. I remember telling him, "Well, if I'm not drafted, if I don't get into grad school, then, yes, maybe that's something I wouldn't mind doing."

Then I thought about it, and Lowell and I were sort of talking about the long-range whatever, I mean, the future of "Amerasia," and we both concluded that it could never survive at Yale, because there were very few alumni and it really didn't have much of a community kind of locally and so forth. So I said, "Well, what if I talk to the people at UCLA? Would you be interested in going out there? Maybe I can convince them to take this journal on," right? So he said yes,

because he had a real high draft number and he wasn't going to be drafted. So I talked to Alan and I said, "Again, I'm not sure about my situation, but you guys are a research center. Have you thought at all about having a journal?" I mean, they had seen the first issue and so forth.

He said, "Well, not really. We're coming out with our first book." It was a book called "Roots," which evolved from a reader from the very first Asian American Studies class here at UCLA, and eventually "Roots" becomes the very first book that's published, first of like two hundred books published by the Asian American Studies Center here, becomes the standard textbook for Asian American Studies classes for over a decade, and sells fifty thousand copies. They had helped start "Gidra" and so forth. Well, here's an idea of a journal. And I said, "We have the editor. What if you're to pay him to be an editor and maybe subsidize one of the two issues a year or something. Then we can have co-authorship, the Yale Asian American Student Association and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center." He said, "Fine," so it worked out.

So I'm not drafted. I get into grad school, and Lowell comes here. We put out, I think, one or two more issues in which it's co-authored between Yale AASA, which really has nothing to do with it anymore, and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, and then it really becomes UCLA's journal. And really, if the center itself had not subsidized the editor position and the production and all that other stuff for all these years, we wouldn't have had "Amerasia Journal." It plays such a significant role in the development of the field of Asian American studies, and now all thirty thousand pages of it are online. But at a time when many journals--and in some ways it's still true now--when many of the top journals in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in kind of the more professional school disciplines, hardly ever published anything on Asian Americans, because they really didn't consider it to be that important, okay, that "Amerasia" was there kind of as a forum where people in the field could be speaking to one another and so forth--and so that's how "Amerasia" kind of gets started.

But I also remember my senior year--so I'm taking all these poly-sci classes, and I'm really into it. And even though I can apply to med school, and I'm sure I could have gotten into med school because of the grades I had and everything else, I decide, no, I want to go to

graduate school, and not so much with the idea that I wanted to be a professor, but I still had these questions that I wanted to kind of explore. I remember in my statement of purpose for graduate schools that what I wrote about was not researching coalitions and all that, because I was sort of doing all that, but instead to return to looking at my initial interests of looking at Japanese Americans in the context of U.S.-Japan relations, but in a broader sense to look at minority groups generally in the context of international politics and to understand what they did politically beyond their borders, as well as how international politics affected their domestic situation. It was with that that I applied to these various grad schools, and the school and the person who came after me the most, and, man, I should have just gone along with it, was Harold Isaacs at MIT. I remember after getting into grad schools, going up to Cambridge and going to Harvard. They couldn't care less who the hell I was. I go to the secretary, I introduce myself, and I'm expecting something more like what Yale is. Yale can be a very, very warm and very supportive place and everything. And I'm getting kind of the cold shoulder from the secretary for the chair and everything, and yet--and then I go and visit Harold Isaacs at MIT. Oh, wonderful guy, and I could tell you a whole story about him, but a wonderful guy and everything. I tell him what schools I've gotten into and so forth, and he kind of said, "Well, it's a tough choice, but if you do come up to Cambridge, please look me up," and everything.

I don't know, maybe this is where my head governed my decision more than my heart, but Yale and Harvard were tied for number one in terms of the best poly-sci departments, and they were great in different ways. Yale is great in American politics and what was called political behavior, which sort of was like using many other disciplines to look at politics, so like psychological interpretations of political leaders; or psychological things dealing with why people follow leaders; or political economy, how does economics affect political decisions, and so forth; how does organizational theory affect how bureaucracies work, and all that. And that's what this guy Harold Isaacs had pioneered and everything, kind of using other disciplines and everything to look at politics.

Well, Harvard was number one in terms of political theory or political philosophy, as well as international politics. I had taken all

these grad courses when I was a senior, and I said, man, I've got to get out of here. I want to go to another school. And because of my interest in looking at minorities in the context of international politics, Harvard was the place, and Harvard was the place that had this one professor, who at one time had been at Yale, a guy named Karl [W.] Deutsch, a very, very famous political scientist, who'd done somewhat similar things at one time. And I thought, boy, I'm going to go study with this guy. I didn't meet him during this one visit, and there's a reason for it. I would never see him, I mean, even when I got there and he was my advisor. So I decided to go to Harvard.

And I remember writing this apologetic letter to Harold Isaacs. Then Isaacs calls me up and he says, "You know, really sad that you're not coming to join us at MIT, but I'm involved in this project, and I'd love to have you participate in it." It turns out to be this wonderful project involving Japanese scholars and American scholars looking at each other's--how each country looks at one another. The leader of the group is a guy named Akira Iriye, who would become, like, the giant in Japanese history. He was at Chicago at that time, and he would eventually go to Harvard, but one of the most renowned historians of Japanese politics and so forth. Just a tremendous line-up on both sides, right, of these very senior profs. And Isaacs says, "What they could really benefit from, and I've already cleared this with Iriye, is somebody who will look at Japanese Americans and see how Japanese Americans figured into all of this, how they're affected by the perceptions, how they look at the two countries," right?

So I get recruited into this amazing project that eventually takes me to Hawaii for this conference and everything else, and starts this relationship with Isaacs, and eventually gets me a publication in a book that's published by Harvard Press, but it's a real start to an academic career and so forth. So that's kind going to Harvard.

I'm trying to think if there's an interesting story about my parents.

Cline

Yes. It's so weird. I was going to say, what was your perception at this point, on the family front, of what you're doing? I mean, you've shifted direction. Now you're going to grad school at Harvard. What are things like at home?

Nakanishi

Well, my parents got over the fact that I wasn't going to become a doctor, because by that stage, by my senior year, my brother had become a dentist. So when I said I was going to go to grad school in political science, I still remember my mother saying, "What's political science?" [laughs] But I think they're happy that I was going to go up to Harvard. I think they had heard of Harvard before. I remember that my folks did not go out to my brother's graduation, for whatever reasons, at Case Western Reserve [University] in Cleveland, but they did come to my graduation the following year. I remember this was their first time they had ever come to the East Coast, and I remember meeting them at JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport], and then we went to New York and we spent a couple of days there, and they were just amazed to see New York. Then we went up to Yale for the graduation and so forth. I remember Rudy Alvarez and his wife taking us out to dinner someplace out in the suburbs and so forth, and, I mean, they were real proud when I graduated and so forth. I got a couple of awards, one for the best senior essay on American politics, of all things writing about, right, these radical groups, and also the Saybrook College Fellows' Prize for most outstanding graduate of the class. Then I took them up to Harvard and we went around Cambridge and all that. I remember they were both just in amazement, I mean, almost all the time, I mean, just looking at how different the East Coast looked from Los Angeles and so forth.

Years later, probably about ten years later, sometimes in the seventies I believe it is, but you can look it up if you want, I was contacted by these attorneys in New Haven who said that they were going to file a class-action suit against the New Haven Police [Department] for wiretapping people. And as it turned out, my phone was wiretapped during my senior year, along with a very good friend of mine who was active with AASA, named Henry [K.] Hayase, who was from Gardena, California, who was like two years younger than me. Henry's college was like right across the street. Henry was very, very active with AASA and so forth, and for whatever reasons, Henry was also identified as being wiretapped. Eventually, there were about a hundred and some people that were part of this class-action lawsuit, and eventually it was settled outside of court, and we each got a thousand dollars. I was trying to figure out why it was that I got put on it and why Henry got put on

it. It doesn't necessarily mean it was constant surveillance, but I didn't know whether it related at all to all of my activities during the summer up at Berkeley and the Bay Area, that somebody was trying to check in or whatever. Henry had not been doing those things, so maybe I was calling him up for dinner or something, you know? But I was part of this class-action suit. It was something like something versus O'Hearn, who was the police chief at that time, and most of the others, I'm sure, were connected with the Bobby Seale and other protests, and so forth.

Cline

Right. Wow, interesting. You mentioned the presidential hopefuls that emanated from your time at Yale. You mentioned Howard Dean. Wasn't there another early female law student, I believe, at Yale at that point?

Nakanishi

I'm fairly certain that I met Hillary [Rodham] Clinton when I was probably a junior, but maybe a senior. I went to visit one of our members of AASA, a guy named Peter Choy, who had gone to Yale undergraduate and who was one of the principal starters also of the Asian American Student Association. He was I think a first-year, but maybe he was a second-year by then, law student, and I went to have dinner with him in the dining hall at the law school. He introduced me to one of three women in his class of 165 people, and one was from Radcliffe [College], one was from Smith [College], and one was from Wellesley [College], and the one was Wellesley was the one that he introduced me to, and that had to be Hillary Clinton.

Then I could swear that I met Bill [William J.] Clinton, or somebody like Bill Clinton or whatever, because I remember another episode at the law school and sort of walking through their courtyard and walking out of law school, and walking behind a couple of law professors--I mean, they just seem older and whatever--and there's a guy like in front of them who was a kind of taller guy, so I never saw his face or anything, and maybe they're talking about somebody else, but they're saying, "This guy is going to be attorney general someday." And I think to be an attorney general, I mean, you not only need kind of the smarts and everything, but you need the political savvy, and I think Clinton had it at that time, and he is a Rhodes Scholar and all that stuff.

Another member of my class was this guy, Kurt Schmoke, who I think I had talked about at one time. Kurt had come from Baltimore. He was an outstanding athlete, and he was captain of the freshman football team, had kind of gone undefeated, but then he had gotten hurt playing lacrosse, so he never played sports again. But he was very, very active with different kinds of organizations. He's very much a moderate. I mean, he was not way to the left in terms of black politics or whatever. He had many friends of all kinds. I mean, he didn't just hang around with blacks.

And when we had the whole Bobby Seale thing, Kurt was the one who--maybe this is how it worked out. Kurt led an effort--and we didn't have like student-body presidents or whatever, but he became kind of the leader of the student body. He's a junior at that stage, and he made a presentation to the Yale faculty. I mean, it could be after Kingman Brewster's comment; it could be before, because they're both kind of consistent. But he really urged Yale not to overreact and not to shut its doors and to be more responsive to whatever, the people that were going to come to voice their concerns and so forth. He didn't have to say, "If you don't do this, they're going to burn this place down." He also said that Yale needed to do more for the community, and one thing that he championed was a daycare center on Yale's campus for workers, not for professors or whatever. And faculty thought he was great. I mean, he wasn't some angry person coming in there and screaming at them. He was very moderate and so forth.

And Yale survives the May Day weekend, and he's a hero, right? I don't know. I have a feeling that Kurt was among others in my class, who from day one knew what a Rhodes Scholar was, and he kind of knew what it took to be a Rhodes Scholar. You had to not only be smart, you also had to be involved, and you also had to be an athlete of some sort. I mean, it could be intramural sports, but you have to show some kind of athletic stuff, so you couldn't just be a dork in the library, right. And Kurt was kind of all those things, right?

I remember Kurt got a recommendation, an unusual recommendation. During the summer between my junior and senior year, John Hersey, the very famous author of "Hiroshima," was one of the masters of one of the colleges. I think he was the master of Kurt's college, Davenport College, and he writes a book about the

whole May Day thing that gets published in the fall. And when Kurt applied for the Rhodes Scholarship, John Hersey sends in his recommendation and says, "Well, this is Kurt Schmoke. Just read chapter four, five, and six," or something, "and you'll know what Kurt did." So, obviously, Kurt became a Rhodes Scholar, and he came back and went to Harvard Law School and then got recruited back to Baltimore, I think initially for some private firm, but then quickly into politics, and for fifteen, maybe even twenty years, he was the mayor of Baltimore, but could never go higher.

I think the thing that hurt him was that pretty early on, Princeton-- why he followed a Princeton [University] professor is beyond me. But there was a Princeton professor who was arguing that, actually, the interest in marijuana would go lower if it were decriminalized, okay. Well, in some interview or town hall [meeting] or something fairly early on when Kurt was mayor--and this was when we had, I mean, all this controversy about drugs--Kurt makes a statement about decriminalizing marijuana use and everything. I think that was the end of his political career beyond Baltimore. But he was something under Clinton's administration for a while. He has been the dean of Howard University Law School for the last ten years, and he was a member of the Yale Corporation, which is kind of the board of trustees, for many, many years, a very, very nice guy.

Cline

In closing, since it did sound like you were decidedly underwhelmed, what was so different about the Harvard experience that made you sort of demonstrate a little bit of what sounded like a lack of enthusiasm for Harvard?

Nakanishi

Well, like I said, I went there to study under this one professor, Karl Deutsch, and I still remember taking two of his classes, a seminar class and a lecture class. I thought both of them were quite brilliant classes. Then I would have this relationship with Harold Isaacs, and they were like just entirely different kind of scholars. I mean, one was much more into numbers, into theory building and all that kind of looking at poly-sci like a scientist, okay, and wanting to really make it into a science. But it had these interests in issues like nationalism and so forth in Europe, which took him into looking at ethnic minorities and so forth in Europe and so forth, and in Europe there have been a number of conflicts that have involved minorities

that overlap international borders and so forth, and they kind of play off different countries, or they're accused of different things. Then you have just horrible situations like the Holocaust and so forth.

And then Harold Isaacs. He was Jewish, as opposed to Deutsch, who was German, and he had grown up in New York. He had gone to Columbia [University], where he became a radical, and after graduating from Columbia, he and his wife [Viola Isaacs] go to China to start a newspaper, a Stalinist newspaper. I forget what the name of this paper is, but he's kind of reporting on developments in China and the revolution that's about to take place and so forth. And actually, for one year, he and his wife kind of guarded this person who would later become a big hero in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, who was in China to study and so forth, and they kind of protected him from the police and everything.

Isaacs was a journalist, and sometime in the fifties he comes back to the U.S. and he is recruited by Harvard's Center for International Studies to, whatever, be a researcher on China politics. He is a prolific writer, and he also becomes a target of [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy.

Cline

I would think.

Nakanishi

McCarthy goes after him, and Isaacs said that MIT just did everything in its power to protect him. So eventually, McCarthy backs off and from that stage on, I mean, he is just eternally grateful for everything that MIT does. He eventually goes into the professorial ranks or series, becomes a full prof, and by the time I meet him, he's got like twenty books and everything. But he doesn't believe in all this theory and jargon and everything else, okay. He once made the statement, and I always repeat the statement, particularly to social scientists, and they're always offended initially, but Harold Isaacs said, "Most social science research is autobiographical." And they go, "Well, we don't do that autobiography about ourself." And what Isaacs meant was not that they wrote about themselves, but that their kind of individual situations, their experiences and everything else influences, I mean, where they study, what topics they study, the way in which they study things and so forth.

So here are these two different kinds of guys. I mean, one is teaching me all of the kind of theory stuff, urging me to take more quantitative things. Here's this other who's taught me how to do interviews and everything and who teaches me to record interviews almost verbatim by being like a journalist, right, and taking these notes and so forth, and then kind of amplifying on them right after the interview. And one who thinks I'm a very, very good writer, and the other, who is like taking apart my writing and who says, "You can't have a sentence that's three lines long." And, "Don't use a four-syllable word when you can use a three; don't use a three when you can use a two; and don't use a two when you can use a one," right? Not only did I look at how he would mark up and critique my writing, but I also looked really carefully at his, and like a journalist, I mean, every sentence is very, very short, right, and to the point. But it is written so well that you think you're reading, I mean, kind of an endless sentence, right? That's not bad. I mean, he at least adopted kind of the more novelist kind of, whatever, standard, which is to at least have paragraphs that are more than like two sentences long or something, so it's not completely journalistic. But I mean, he really believed in doing these in-depth interviews and really kind of doing things in depth. So completely opposite, but just the wonderful kind of multidisciplinary kind of training that I got.

My dissertation--at Harvard we didn't have dissertation sort of oral exams or whatever. When you propose a dissertation topic, what it comes down to is you file a three-by-five card and talk about what the title is and who your advisor is going to be. Karl Deutsch was going to be my advisor, and I said--and by that stage, I'm back here doing interviews and so forth. And I remember twice making appointments with Deutsch and flying out there and then he wouldn't see me, okay. He had dental exams or whatever. And I should have known better, because in the ten or fifteen years he had been at Harvard, he had graduated one doctoral student.

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

Okay? I mean, either his standards were too high, or he just didn't help people. So I turned to a guy that had just come to Harvard, a very, very renowned survey research in comparative politics guy,

named Sidney Verba. Sidney I guess had observed enough about Deutsch to understand what was happening, so he agreed to be my advisor, but actually, Isaacs was the one who was really my mentor and so forth.

Initially, I had come here--did I go very much into that, my dissertation?

Cline

No. No.

Nakanishi

Do you have time?

Cline

Well, I've got a few minutes.

Nakanishi

Well, yes, I can finish it. I came out here with the idea of--I had developed this whole framework and everything else about looking at minorities in the context of international politics, both how they participated in that, as well as the impact. I wanted to look at two groups that I thought had contrasting kind of experiences in this regard, and one were American Jews and their very, very extensive relationships with Israel at that time, and Japanese Americans, who appeared not to have very strong relationship with Japan. So I was going to go and interview. I mean, I had done a lot of the documentary kind of stuff, documenting materials and analysis, but I wanted to interview like the leaders and so forth, to kind of understand things a little more.

By that stage, I mean, I had already conducted, I guess, fifty depth interviews, having worked on this other project with Isaacs, so I kind of knew some interview techniques and so forth. Those had all dealt with U.S.-Japan relations and all that. So I start interviewing the very, very top leaders from both Japanese American and American Jewish communities here in L.A., and for my very first five interviews with American Jews, and with two or three of the first Japanese Americans, when I asked the question, "Do you think what happened during World War II could happen again?"--okay, so I could ask that same question to both groups, right, without saying what that thing was--and in the course of their response, five of the American Jewish leaders and two of the first five Japanese American leaders broke down and cried. Well, I'll tell you, the first time that happened, I mean, I was totally freaked out, right? I was saying,

man, I wasn't trained for this. I mean, I wasn't trained through textbooks or through Isaacs or whatever, so I just kind of froze. And I mean, I was recording everything by pen, no tape recorder or whatever, because Isaacs said, "If you have a tape recorder, you're going to rely on the tape recorder to think for you," as opposed to having your writing.

So I remember just putting my pen and pad down, and then the person would compose themselves, and then they would kind of say, "I'm sorry." And I'd say, "I'm really sorry I did that." And they'd say, "No, no, it's just something I haven't worked out," or whatever. And when you're talking about the early seventies, I mean, this is before both groups had really--before, I mean, whether it's movies, whether it's novels, whether it's just the communities kind of coming to grips with these events.

So after like the first seven or so, I said, I'm sort of getting this thing about why the different relationships with their so-called homelands, but a lot of it relates to World War II. So I decided at that stage to completely turn around my dissertation and almost return to my kind of intellectual roots or roots in poly-sci at Yale, which was much more into looking at more individual, more psychological kinds of things, and so the dissertation really became one of trying to understand how the Holocaust and the internment affected the political thinking of American Jewish and Japanese American leaders, and why they remembered and sort of what impact and so forth. It still kind of answered that question about international politics, but it went way beyond all of that, and I sort of delved into all this literature about survivors of big events, whether it was stuff about Holocaust or about the Hiroshima atomic bombing or the great depression or about natural disasters or whatever, so that's what my dissertation became. It's clearly more consistent with Isaacs' thinking too.

Cline

Right. Amazing. Okay. Well, next time, life after Harvard. Thank you.

1.6. Session 6 (February 26, 2010)

Cline

Today is February 26, 2010. This is Alex Cline interviewing Don Nakanishi in Conference Room A in Powell Library, the College

Library here on UCLA campus. This is session number six. Thanks for coming out, making the drive across town.

We left off last time with basically the end of your college career. You talked about your graduation at Yale. You talked about going to Harvard, the events, the experience that informed the change in your dissertation topic or focus. One of the things I wanted to ask you in relation to that last bit is how, if at all, your relationship with your parents, or at least some of the information you may have ultimately known about them and their background, came directly, perhaps, out of this change in focus, your dissertation topic, World War II, part of that being the internment and that whole experience.

Nakanishi

Well, I'm not sure I talked about what I really learned in all the details of--or more of the details of what happened to them during World War II, which was actually when my folks and my wife's folks met for the very first time.

Cline

Really.

Nakanishi

Oh, okay, so I haven't talked about that then.

Cline

No. You haven't said anything about your wife's family or anything.

Nakanishi

My wife's name is Marsha [Hirano-Nakanishi], and she was born in Chicago. Her parents [Ben and Alice Hirano]--I know her father was at Manzanar; I forget where her mother was. They, like many other Japanese Americans, had left the camps to go and work or to go to college in the Midwest or the East Coast. My father-in-law also was drafted and went through Japanese-language training and served during the occupation of Japan. So they're more typically Nisei or second-generation Japanese Americans and could speak some Japanese, but clearly did not have the really extensive personal history in Japan, like my parents had.

So the first time we brought them together, we're in this big car. I was driving my father's big white Oldsmobile, and we could seat six people in it. I remember my mother-in-law asking my folks, which was quite typical in those days, "What camp were you in?" So my folks said Poston, which was something I knew. So they said, "We were in Manzanar." I know that Ben, my father-in-law, was in

Manzanar. I'm not quite sure about my mother-in-law. I think she was in another camp and then had gone to Salt Lake City before going to Chicago. So she said, "Oh, we were in Manzanar and such-and-such, and then afterwards Ben was drafted. But we went to Chicago. Where did you go?" And so my folks said, "Oh, we went to Tule Lake." And like that--

Cline

Okay. Now, see, you told that part, but you didn't give it a context, so, wow.

Nakanishi

Yes, and so that was a big shock, and I went, "What?" I had not known until that stage that they had actually been sent up to Tule Lake, that they had been part of a group of other Japanese American Kibei Nisei, who had protested their confinement at Poston, had answered no to two questions about foreswearing allegiance to the emperor of Japan and whatever, loyalty to the U.S. president, and also whether they would serve the armed forces and so forth. So as a result of answering no to those two questions, they had been sent up to Tule Lake, which then became a very special camp up in northern California near the Oregon border, for people who had answered no and who for the most part--many of them were interested in returning to Japan.

That's where some other kind of things that I had remembered about my parents had sort of made some connection. I didn't quite know why they sort of knew people in Fresno, even though I think it was my mother's second or third cousin or something like that. As it turned out, after they decided that they didn't want to go back to Japan because of the bombing of Hiroshima, they asked for permission to stay here, and then once that was granted, it took them about a year or whatever of picking fruits and vegetables and so forth throughout central California, to make it back eventually to L.A.

Cline

So when exactly was that, that you got this piece of information kind of dropped in the Oldsmobile there.

Nakanishi

I think it was around 1974 or thereabouts, sometime before my wife and I got married, and we got married in December of 1974, because 2009 was our thirty-fifth anniversary.

Cline

So when you were researching and actively pursuing this topic for your dissertation, how much, if any, insight did you gain into your parents' situation? I mean, clearly, this one piece had not been discovered yet, but one of the things that interests me is how much maybe you shared with your parents and perhaps what their reaction was to this endeavor that you were involved in then.

Nakanishi

I don't remember talking a whole lot with my parents about that. I do know that--I do sort of recall one conversation I had with my father, and I don't know whether it related to this dissertation or whether it related to an earlier study I had done under the guidance of Harold Isaacs, in which I had interviewed Japanese American leaders here in southern California. I remember my father being quite amazed that I was interviewing these people that he considered to be kind of big shots in the community and that he would never have thought of interacting with in terms of his social circles and so forth. So I remember one person in particular, and that was a guy named Kenji Ito, who was an attorney in Little Tokyo, and, actually, I think, the very first Japanese American ever to pass the California [State] Bar, and who had been a very, very long-time attorney, who lived into his nineties. So I remember telling my father I was going to go and see Kenji Ito, and he was like shocked that I was going to see this guy. So I don't think so. I don't think we talked a whole lot about that.

Cline

Because it is kind of interesting, your pursuing this topic that's so intimately plays into your parents' history. But I was wondering if they even found the idea of being able to do this as an academic pursuit interesting or odd. And certainly, it's very far from your earlier pre-med direction.

Nakanishi

Not really. I don't think they really understood for a very long time exactly what you did in political science, or what you did as a scholar, so I don't think that.

Cline

One thing that did come up glancingly in our last session was the draft. This was a time when the Vietnam War was going on, when you were still in college. What do you remember about your

relationship to that possibility and what your feelings might have been? Since I have to think that that was always somewhere in the back of your mind. It was for so many people then.

Nakanishi

Well, I think there was concern, namely, if you weren't in college or doing some other things that would get you exempt from the draft, that if you were not pursuing those things, that you were going to be drafted and you're going to go and fight in Vietnam. And so if you did not, in a sense, want to pursue college or other kinds of things that would get you out of the draft, then maybe it made more sense for you to volunteer and to kind of set your own sort of goals or activities or whatever with respect to the military. So I had a very good friend from high school and junior high who decided he just didn't want to keep going with community college, and a very, very bright guy, but just at that stage in his life just didn't want to do it, and so he volunteered for the Air Force and eventually went to Germany, never had to serve in Vietnam.

And, clearly, the antiwar movement was picking up my freshman, sophomore year and so forth, and the death count in Vietnam was mounting. I mean, this whole society was going through unbelievable change, I mean, with the Civil Rights Movement, the women's movement, the counterculture, everything. I sort of remember that there was a decision, and I would imagine it was something that was approved by Congress as well as by the president, and the draft was put into place, and there would be a lottery of sorts. Why do I remember it sort of being like bingo, I mean, with all these balls or something being put in someplace and their pulling out either numbers that--I think numbers that corresponded with dates of the calendar, so like number one was January first, and it sort of went down the list like that. And 365 balls were put into something, and I remember in anticipation of this event, I mean, it was broadcast probably on TV--we didn't watch it on TV; we heard it on radio--and in anticipation of that, people were making bets in terms of who would have the lowest number, which meant that you might win, but then again, you'd be drafted, right?

Cline

Right. The winner-slash-loser.

Nakanishi

I sort of recall it being in the fall. I may be wrong, but I sort of think it was in the fall of 1969. It could have been the spring of '69, I don't know. I'm sure this can all be looked up. I remember going to the room of Carlos Moreno, this good friend of mine, who has since become a member of the California Supreme Court, and one other person, and we were listening to the radio. They would pull out-- they would say, "Number one is," and they would say, "December fifteen. Number two is June fourth," or whatever.

And one of our very good friends, Joaquin Avila, who's a guy who pulled me into doing the grape boycott and everything else, had the lowest number of all of us. It was less than a hundred. And at that time, if you had a number--I know that particular year, and I was a junior, that if that particular year, if you had a number less than 175, you were going to be drafted. Mine was something like--it was either 179 or 197, so it looked like I was okay, at least for that year. I mean, it could have very well changed the following year, right? And then I remember Carlos had a number somewhere in the two hundreds, and the other person we were with had a number somewhere in the two hundreds, and so we felt awfully bad for Joaquin Avila. As it turned out, Joaquin got into Harvard Law School, and I don't know, he was able to work the system in such a way that he was never drafted. He would get sort of notices to report for his physical, and because he was--and he started getting them right before he was going to enter Harvard Law School. So he would get the notice, let's say, in Compton, which is his home town, and he'd say, "I can't report then, because I'm in law school over here in Cambridge, so can we move it to Boston?" And then when they gave him a date there, he would say, "I'm not going to be there at that time, because it's spring break," or something. "Can you give it to me in Compton?"

Then I remember he got married, and I would assume he got married for more than just draft purposes, but getting married was like another consideration if you ever had to appear before a draft board. But somehow he got through all three years of law school and by then the draft was ended. But, yes, it was a scary little period there, and it was really the luck of the draw.

Cline

And [Richard M.] Nixon was president, which didn't help. [laughs]
So as you were headed towards the completion of your dissertation,

what plans, if any, did you have for what you wanted to do after that, after you completed your Ph.D.?

Nakanishi

Well, before I finish my Ph.D., I actually got an offer to be here at UCLA in the Political Science Department as an acting assistant prof, and I was actually here for three years. It was really at the end of those three years that I completed my dissertation, and so I got kind of a taste of what it meant to be a prof and to teach and to do research and so forth. Then after that, I got a postdoc to go to Japan, and I was there for, I forget, seven or nine months, in which I did this project looking at the different ways in which second-generation Japanese Americans were involved in the occupation of Japan, both on the side of the Japanese as well as on the side of the Americans, as well as in the military aspect, as well as the sort of private sector, whether it's in business or journalism or communications or whatever. So I interviewed a number of the Japanese Americans who were still living there, and did a number of oral history interviews and so forth.

This was really the first time I had returned to Japan ever since I was five years old in '54, so it was some twenty-four years afterwards, and it provided me with an opportunity to kind of link up with my mother's family in Japan, and that began for me really a very, very strong ongoing relationship with all of those relatives, which involved my mother's three sisters and one brother and their families. So actually, when we had a family gathering in Hiroshima, it was much bigger than the family gathering here in L.A. So every year or two, I go and see them, and my son [Thomas Nakanishi] had the opportunity of spending a couple of summers in Japan, and one summer in particular just in Hiroshima, living with one set of aunts and uncles and working at the Peace Museum there in Hiroshima.

It's also while I was there--and this is really, well, I guess it makes sense chronologically--that my father came to visit me. It was the first time my father had returned to Japan ever since 1939, so you can imagine for him it was thirty-five, thirty-six, no, more than that, almost forty years. Yes, he was on a tour, and his first stop was Tokyo. So I saw him and we had dinner together, and it's one of two times that I saw my father cry. I don't know if I talked about the other time.

Cline

You mentioned something about this, I think, in our first session, actually, but I don't remember which instance you were discussing then. He didn't want to go to Hiroshima, was that right?

Nakanishi

Yes. Well, he felt obligated and also the tour was going to go to Hiroshima, so he had to go and see them. Yes, I guess I had talked about that. That's where he talked about how he had failed, and that my mother--he had taken my mother away from her family and all that, and he wasn't as successful as some of the relatives and so forth. So for me it was an opportunity to kind of connect with Japan in a way in which I had in some ways not had a whole lot of interest in doing for, well, ever since then. I mean, I had gone to Japanese school and things like that, but that was more out of a sense of obligation than anything else.

Cline

Well, what were your feelings and potential comfort level or lack thereof, once you were in Japan? How did it feel to you?

Nakanishi

Well, I had several friends who were Japanese Americans about my same age and who had gone to Japan after college to study Japanese or teach English or something, and many of them, I observed, had a really difficult time the first year. One, because their language was not kind of native and so forth, and they, I guess, had met some people or had been so sensitive that they had encountered situations in which people had criticized them or had made fun of their language and so forth. I think many of them had gone to Japan to search for their identity. And also, just the kind of way in which Japanese culture puts such an emphasis on kind of group activities and so forth, that many of them felt isolated. They couldn't speak the language that well. They weren't finding their identity in Japan, and so they had kind of a miserable time that first year.

Cline

Well, they were from essentially a different culture altogether.

Nakanishi

Yes, right, right. And yet, those who stuck it out and stayed there the second year, well, one, their language got better. They developed friendships and so became part of groups, and I mean,

their comfort level--and they weren't searching for their Japanese identity anymore, I mean, because they realized they were either these things called Americans, or they were these kind of even more unique kind of things called Japanese Americans, right, and so they didn't worry about that.

So I knew that I was only going to be in Japan for seven months or nine months, I forget what it was, and I said, I can't deal with that kind of stuff, so I'm just going to be an American. I just don't want to get hung up in that identity stuff. My Japanese is not that fluent, so that unless it's something like ordering at a restaurant or something like that, I'm just going to speak English and try to get by that way. And with my relatives, I'm going to try my best just to speak whatever comes out of my mouth in Japanese, and that's pretty much how I handled it. Almost all of my interviews were in English, because they were with Japanese Americans. And just in kind of daily routines, shopping and everything else, I mean, a lot of my Japanese came back, just watching television or whatever. And then when I would visit my relatives in Hiroshima, they would kind of laugh because I would speak a number of colloquial kind of phrases and use colloquial words from kind of old Hiroshima, which they thought nobody had spoken anymore, so that's pretty much how I got by. But, clearly, it didn't turn me off or anything, because my interest remained strong and still remains kind of strong, just to kind of go there.

Cline

So how did you meet your wife, and when did that happen?

Nakanishi

I knew Marsha in high school, actually. I remember the first time, I think, was when we had a conference at Roosevelt [High School] in which we invited the representatives of student governments from other schools in what was called the Eastern League. That was Roosevelt, Garfield [High School], and she had gone to Wilson High School, which is in El Sereno, and then Lincoln [High School] and Huntington Park [High School], South Gate [High School] or whatever, and they all came to Roosevelt and had a conference or something, and I think that was the first time I met her.

Then she was the same age and everything else, and I remember meeting her father, who was very active with the Japanese American Veterans Association, was very active with the athletic

leagues and so forth. Her father either was in charge or one of those that was interviewing boys that would be sponsored by the veterans organization to go to Boys State, and that's, I think, how I kind of remembered her father. Then Marsha was valedictorian of her class and all that, and she went up to Stanford [University]. I remember when I was in college, once in a while when I was back, I would go to the downtown library and kind of bump into her or whatever.

It was really when we were at Harvard--and after she graduated from Stanford with a degree in math, she went to this program called Teacher Corps, which is like Peace Corps but you go and teach. She had gone to Salinas and that area to teach, and she decided to go after a doctorate in education or educational policy and had applied to Harvard.

It was a classmate of mine at Harvard in poly-sci, a guy named Ken Oye--Ken was a third-generation Japanese American who had grown up in Philadelphia, and his father was Kibei, like my father, and had left the camps to go and work with the Quakers in Philadelphia, to help with the relocation of college students from the camps into colleges, and had remained in the Philadelphia area, and Ken and his brother went to Swarthmore [College], which was close by in Philadelphia, and then had come to Harvard poly-sci. So Ken actually took some mathematical modeling or something in social-sciences class at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], and Marsha happened to go to the class too, to kind of check it out or whatever. They talked, and Marsha said she was from East L.A. and all that, so Ken said, "Oh, do you know Don Nakanishi?" and so forth. That's when Ken said, "Oh, you ought to go--she remembers you," or whatever. So we had lunch and all that, and that's how it started.

Cline

Wow. A lot of common ground there. And you got married at the end of '74, you say?

Nakanishi

Yes.

Cline

Where exactly was your career at the time that you got married, then? What were you doing?

Nakanishi

I was working as a staff member at the Asian American Studies Center, and then we got married and we drove across the country, and I became a graduate fellow at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard. We used to call it the CIA, but they called it the CFIA to not confuse things. I was working on my dissertation, because I had completed all my interviews and everything, and that's when I got this offer to come to UCLA for a few years and came over here.

Cline

So then you went to Japan and presumably left your wife wherever she was at that point. What happened when you came back and you finished your postdoc?

Nakanishi

I worked at the center for a couple of years and then the center decided to use one of its, I guess at that time, six institutional faculty positions to recruit at the ed school [School of Education]. This would be a joint position between education and Asian American Studies, and the area in which this position was going to be held was the social science, or actually at that time the international and comparative education sort of specialization within education. They were going to create like an ethnic kind of studies kind of area within it, and they had a group of very, very supportive faculty members, and in particular John Hawkins, who had been active with the Asian American Studies Center, but also Tom [Thomas] LaBelle and Val [D.] Rust. So they wanted someone who kind of had obviously educational interests, but also someone who had perhaps some international interest, because then they could kind of, whatever, help with the students and so forth.

So there was a national search, and, actually, my wife also applied for it, and she and I and one other person, and I think it was Sucheng Chan who then went on to UC [University of California] Santa Barbara, who were the three finalists, and that's when I was selected. At that time, I mean, my resume in education was pretty thin in comparison with my wife, who had a doctorate in education and did educational policy and so forth. But they wanted this position to help develop the field of Asian American educational research. There really wasn't a whole lot happening in that field at that time, and so it wasn't like anybody had done a whole lot in there.

So I first develop a course in that area, so that clearly convinced me there wasn't a whole lot there yet. But the other thing that was beginning to brew around that time--and this was 1982--and I'm just going to throw this out. If you want to explore it later, you can do so. But right before I started the position in the fall of 1982, I worked for two months for Tom [Thomas] Bradley and his campaign for governor, to set up the sort of Asian American campaign for that, okay. But going back to the education position, one thing that was starting to happen around in the early 1980s and which became just a huge, huge issue, and which got me involved in advocacy work, helped me produce a number of research papers, and may have also gotten me into trouble, and may have had some impact in terms of when I went up for tenure, was this controversy about the growing number of Asian Americans on college campuses, and in particular the Ivy League schools, [University of California] Berkeley, and UCLA.

Around 1982 or thereabouts--it may have been a little earlier than that, maybe even '81 or '80, the theme of a number of popular magazines, like "Newsweek" and "New York Times" and so forth, was, wow, look what's kind of happening with some of these campuses. They're becoming kind of Asian. And at that time, what that meant was that they were approaching the level of 20 percent, while Berkeley and UCLA, sort of the Ivy Leagues, were approaching like 10 percent, okay. So there was kind of curiosity about that and sort of what were the factors underlying that, and so one could explain that by different kinds of, whatever, cultural things, different motivations, the parents, demographic growth of the community, and so forth.

Well, then around '82, '83, or thereabouts, there was some kind of internal community concern that Asian Americans weren't getting kind of a fair shake in terms of admissions. One kind of argument was that they were facing sort of discrimination just like American Jewish kids used to in the twenties and thirties and so forth, that there were sort of quotas and other things, that it was harder for an Asian American to get in, and then on the other that, particularly for kids who went to ethnically diverse schools, they would raise questions about why it looked like African American and Latino kids, who had either comparable or somewhat less test scores or grades,

were getting into some of these good schools, and their kids weren't.

And yet, there really was no literature about that. There was really nobody who had collected data or systematically analyzed the data and so forth, and so I became one of those researchers. There was also a more organized effort up in the Bay Area, and they actually had a taskforce with--their principal researcher was Ling-Chi Wang at ethnic studies and Asian American Studies at Berkeley, and then they had some judges, and they had community leaders and so forth, and they had--they called it a UC Berkeley taskforce on admissions, or something like that.

And for the most part, down here it was me, and Lucie Cheng, who was our first director of the center had some interest in this, and Warren Furutani, who also worked at the center at that time as our student-community coordinator also had some interest, and so forth. But I was the one, actually, who because of my involvement with Yale admissions and going all the way back to my activities with MEChA and so forth, and then with the Asian American Student Association [AASA], I was actually one of very, very few Asian Americans who had been kind of directly involved in very, very competitive or very, very selective admissions situations, and where I kind of knew what was involved when a school suddenly had more qualified applicants than they could take, and where they had to start to make some decisions on the kind of freshman class that they wanted to put together or socially engineer, and how there were different interest groups on campus, whether it was the band, whether it was the athletics, whether it was the debate coach, whether it was the science profs or whatever, were all in there trying to get their bodies, right?

And that a school like Yale, 90 percent of the people who apply could easily do Yale work. They all have something going for them, right? And yet, I mean, nowadays you're only going to take 7 percent of them. So something's got to happen, right, and sometimes the decision clearly is in the application and all the letters of recommendation and the essays and all that other stuff. But at other times, there are these other kinds of aims and interests that are trying to be fulfilled. So there's this kind of controversy happening within the community, are Asians being discriminated, right?

And that's when I started, along with Ling-Chi Wang and some others, to kind of take a little closer look and to ask for data and so forth, and to start to make some analysis. So we begin to see that at one time, Asian Americans were viewed kind of as an affirmative-action case, because they had been excluded from these institutions, much like my experience of being one of seven Asian Americans in my freshman class and so forth. Well, when we went to the Yale Admissions Office with AASA and said, "We've got to go and recruit more kids, and we want more Asian Americans here," we were doing that for an institution that had largely been a white institution for over two hundred years, right?

Cline

A white male institution.

Nakanishi

And we were, in a sense, the kind of argument we were making in a sense for affirmative action, in terms of recruitment and admissions, was no different from African Americans and Latinos, and we could make that same argument because there had been so few Asian Americans who had gone to these Ivy League schools and so forth. And yet, from the seventies and into the eighties, the Asian American applicant pool was increasing. So it gets up to the 20 percent at Berkeley and UCLA. It gets up to 10 percent at the Ivy League schools, and, clearly, that was about as much as they wanted.

So when we looked closely at the data, it showed that Asian American applicants had a lower rate of admissions, right, than other groups, and even if we didn't look at underrepresented groups, if we were just to look in comparison with whites, that they had a lower rate of admissions, they had to have higher SAT scores, higher grades and so forth, and there were all these kind of stereotypes still about Asian Americans, at that time whether they could write, whether they were simply good in math and other things like that, whether they're all interested just in science, so that became a big issue, and it became, in a sense, the Asian American admissions' controversy number one. It eventually involved California elected officials. It involved the President of the United States, the attorney general. Every newspaper covered this story, and eventually there were investigations that took place of Harvard, UCLA, and so forth. Berkeley's chancellor at that time [Ira

Michael Heyman], after the data kind of showed that there was discrimination and so forth, apologized. I mean, how many times does a chancellor apologize and everything, right?

So that really got me kind of into doing a lot of the education stuff, and up until that stage, there was like very, very little on Asian Americans in higher education. So it's kind of a skewed way of looking at Asian Americans in higher ed, because you're only looking at the very, very top students, but still, it was kind of a start to that literature.

The other thing that--one, I had sort of that knowledge of selective admissions. The other thing that I had that made my research a little different from some of the others who wrote on this topic was the fact that I looked at the politics of it, and that's where, in a sense, my background in political science and so forth--it was actually in 1976 that I compiled the very first edition of the "National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac." This was the very first compilation of Asian American elected and major appointed officials in the entire United States, and which represented for me, intellectually and so forth, kind of an embrace of the kind of electoral participation of Asian Americans, because I had gone in the whole other direction of kind of looking at this international stuff and kind of saying, "We've got to go beyond this domestic stuff," but actually thought, wow, there's something kind of maybe happening here, so I should begin this.

I still remember that very first almanac having so few elected officials that I could literally type it and staple it, and the elected officials were only in four states, California, Oregon, Washington, and, of course, Hawaii. Our latest one, which came out two years ago, had over two thousand Asian American elected officials in thirty-eight different states, so it kind of shows how Asian Americans just kind of--so I was able to kind of look at sort of how this whole issue also of the admissions controversy played out in relation to the increased electoral interest and kind of courting by the different parties to Asian Americans. So then that definitely made me more of an education person than before.

Cline

Of course, after '65, the anti-Asian immigration situation changed officially in this country, and we started to see a lot more immigration of different groups, different nationalities, particularly

here on the West Coast and especially in the L.A. area. When you began teaching and working here at UCLA--and this is something I was going to ask and fortunately it relates to what you were just talking about--how would you characterize the student body at that point, in terms of diversity and in terms of just kind of the culture of the time? Particularly, I think it's unavoidable compared to, say, now, these days.

Nakanishi

Well, I think my kind of awareness of what was happening in terms of ethnic stuff at UCLA kind of goes back to when I was even in high school. I guess at that time I wouldn't have necessarily characterized UCLA as a white institution, but when I look back, probably less than 10 percent of the UCLA student body in 1967, when I graduated from high school, was Asian American, and the number of Latinos and African Americans combined probably was less than that. So this was largely a white campus, even though no one would quite characterize it like that.

I also don't know whether--I don't know why [unclear] there had been an accurate survey of this, but why it just seems to me that USC [University of Southern California] has a much stronger following, like in football, particularly in East Los Angeles, than UCLA does. And I don't know if that's because we've had some players from Roosevelt, in particular, who have gone to 'SC, like Mike Garrett, who starred there, or whether it was because it just seemed like the teams, particularly the football teams, just had more people of color for a very long time before UCLA seemed to have.

I mean, I'll say this in relation to Asian American kids, that I think the Asian American Studies Center really grew and has become, in a sense, the largest and most prominent Asian American Studies program, not because of a small and talented and committed group of faculty members, but really because of thousands of people that have helped to build it, and among them are just generations or cohorts, yearly cohorts of just remarkably committed students. No other program has that kind of level of commitment. There must be close to a hundred Asian American student groups here right now. I mean, issues involving African American, Latino, Mexican American, Asian American, American Indian students, still appear, but, clearly, when I was here as a staff member, or when I first

start as a faculty member, those issues were much, much more prominent. There was still--this campus had a lot of tensions about sort of its racial climate and so forth, and even though the student body was changing quite rapidly, with things like affirmative action and so forth, and was beginning to look a little bit more like California, or at least a little bit more like the high school graduates of California, that the other parts of the campus weren't. In particular, the faculty and administration was not changing as rapidly and still has a long way to go.

But I think all of those struggles and so forth have made a difference in terms of what this campus has become. It's really unfortunate that we've had Proposition 209, which has really limited the ability to consider a much broader and more diverse pool of applicants that could, I think, still do the work and everything else here at UCLA. We're upwards of like sixty thousand students that apply here for freshman admissions now, the number one school when it comes to number of applicants, and yet the way in which UCLA's selective admissions work is not as flexible and as all-encompassing as a private school can be. I mean, they are not hampered by not being able to look at issues of race and so forth, and so if a Stanford or Harvard or Yale wants the freshman class to be 50 percent students of color, it will be. I mean, not only do they have the applicants. I mean, UCLA has the applicants too. It's the ability to be able to make those kinds of calls.

Cline

Yes. So when you were in your early days here at UCLA and you were married, where did you ultimately live, after, of course, spending your whole growing up in the UCLA area?

Nakanishi

My wife and I always lived--first in Boyle Heights. After I came back for that acting assistant prof position in political science, we lived on Matthews Avenue in Boyle Heights, like two blocks away from Roosevelt. Then when our son was born--and actually, the day he was born we moved to our current house, which is in El Sereno, which is on the east side of L.A., although in the City of L.A.

Cline

When was that? What year?

Nakanishi

1978 [1983], and we've lived there ever since. And the idea was that we wanted our son to be able to know his grandparents as much as he could. They all lived within two or three miles of where we lived. So it became kind of an inconvenience for my wife and I, with respect to our commutes to work, because, I mean, I have always been at UCLA, but my wife has worked at Cal[ifornia] State [University] L.A. [Los Angeles], which was close, but then at Cal State Northridge and then for probably over fifteen years at the Cal State University Chancellor's Office, the headquarters, which is in Long Beach next to the Queen Mary.

Cline

Ouch. What can you say that maybe you haven't said already, about how much or little the neighborhood changed at that point, when you moved back, and the familiar territory that possibly looked a little less familiar, or maybe it did?

Nakanishi

I mean, the changes have clearly been over time. I read a study that the Chicano Studies Research Center here did in 1973, I think it was, about whether--well, actually, it was more the history of and a little bit about the feasibility of unincorporated East L.A. becoming a city. So they provided some demographic information about unincorporated East L.A., which is where I grew up, and in 1970, according to the 1970 census, out of a little over a hundred thousand people, there were three thousand Japanese Americans who lived there. When I look back or think back to that time, after high school and through college and so forth, around my parents' house and so forth, I mean, there were Japanese American families, and they had kids and so forth.

I remember when I was involved with the effort to make East L.A. into a city in 1974, that I remember where all the Japanese Americans lived or where the concentrations were and so forth. Well, that's clearly changed over time. Some of the kind of parents may still be there, but most of the parents are clearly into their eighties and nineties, and most have either passed away or are in nursing homes or so forth, and their kids aren't there, and so there are actually very few Japanese Americans who live there now. Unincorporated East L.A. has more people. It's up to like a hundred and fifty thousand people, and it must be close to 99 percent Latino, probably not just Mexican Americans but other groups.

I also remember when I was a child that I would go from my house, which is on Hazard [Avenue] close to City Terrace Drive, and I would just go to the next street, which was Woolwine [Drive], and I would be able to ride down Woolwine and there would be hardly any cars. Most people used to park their cars in their garages, and nowadays when I drive down Woolwine, there are cars and trucks on both sides of the street. It's hard to find any parking, and I think it's because there are far more people who live in each of those units. Some of the garages probably have been converted to places where people can live. People obviously use the buses, because there are a lot of buses that go through there, but still, they've got to go and commute to all over the city to find jobs, and that's true with all of East L.A. now. You just drive around and, clearly, you sort of empty streets, some that are filled.

I had an opportunity to sit in on a so-called studio class at [Department of] Urban Planning last quarter. It was taught by Professor Vinit Mukhija, and it was a class on East L.A., unincorporated East L.A. The students in the class, and there were about twenty first-year master's students in urban planning, spent the entire quarter looking at East L.A., the history of it and so forth, and then they broke up into small little groups, and they focused on different kind of business and other kinds of defined communities within East L.A. and kind of did analysis of the areas and what they might propose in terms of economic development, business development, housing, other kind of fascinating stuff. They invited me to their final class, in which they presented these proposals, and there's a lot of kind of West Side ideas that are being transplanted, but nonetheless, it was great to kind of see that, but also to see how much East L.A. has really deteriorated.

I think at least part of the blame for that should go to the fact that the effort to become a city was not realized thirty-five years ago. I think some of these business areas, including the little business area near my parents' house in City Terrace, would not look like that if, in fact, there had been a city that was concerned about its sales taxes and other kinds of things and would have done anything to make sure that those areas were as viable as possible, that we would probably have economic zones, we would have different kinds of industrial zones or whatever that we don't have. So I just hope

that--this ain't a great time to be thinking about starting a city, but hopefully sometime in the future that'll happen.

Cline

During the seventies in particular, a lot of big changes occurred in Little Tokyo as well, around the time that you were back in the area and getting settled, raising a family. What do you remember about that, and what were your feelings about it at the time, if you can remember?

Nakanishi

Well, there was a lot of controversy. You had a lot of concern that these Japanese interests, corporate interests, were taking advantage of some opportunities to build buildings, build things like the New Otani Hotel and so forth, and destroy some longstanding sections of Little Tokyo, displacing people who lived in apartments, and community groups that had their offices in some of these buildings and so forth. You also had the people of my generation, who believed that the leadership in the communities were too old fashioned, too accommodationist, too conservative and so forth and we're going to start new organizations. We're going to try to have a new agenda for the community, one of which was to finally deal with all the unfinished business of World War II and to kind of seek recognition for what had happened to Japanese Americans, to seek redress and so forth, and for the community to also kind of deal with it and deal with a lot of the issues.

And then Little Tokyo clearly was starting to go through some redevelopment that also involved Japanese American institutions, and a number of the temples and churches and so forth moved from Boyle Heights, from other areas in the city into Little Tokyo. There was senior-citizen housing that went up and so it was kind of a mixture, but a lot of change.

And then it kind of went through a very difficult period in which-- and this would be, well, from the seventies and so forth all the way up until now, there has really been kind of a declining, I wouldn't say interest--well, maybe it is interest--but a decline in the number of Japanese Americans who go to Little Tokyo to do quite routine things like shopping and even to go to church or whatever. I would say by the time of the L.A. riots, or the second L.A. riots or whatever, in 1992, when some of that disturbance and so forth actually went through Little Tokyo and into Parker Center, which is

right next to Little Tokyo, that a lot of people just didn't want to go to Little Tokyo because they thought it was kind of dangerous and so forth.

And yet, within the last five years or so, there's been a remarkable turnaround, and I think in particular Little Tokyo has become part of this kind of new interest in downtown Los Angeles, with people putting money into housing and so forth, and it's as much in Chinatown as it is in Little Tokyo and the art scene and so forth. So in the evenings, and in particular on weekends, I mean, Little Tokyo is really hopping. I'm not so sure that there are all that many Japanese Americans who go down there. And you still have your community leaders, who are concerned about the future of the community and whether it will still kind of retain a Japanese American kind of, whatever, focus to it. But, clearly, I mean, the restaurants are all packed, and also when you go to things like the East-West Players these days, yes, a lot of times the majority of the people in to see some of those plays are not Asian Americans. I think an institution like the Japanese [Japan] American Theater down there, which would, I think, prefer to do what it's done, what it was sort of set up to do, which was a kind of Japan-oriented program and Japanese American programming, may be missing an opportunity to do something that is somewhat broader than all of that, whether it's jazz or something, that a much, much more diverse group of people are willing to go down to Little Tokyo and spend an evening, right, eating and being entertained and whatever. So I think they're going to have to make some decision.

Cline

Even your temple that you attended as a youngster moved during all this time, and one of the important landmarks was ultimately moved in there and then built next to it, the Japanese American National Museum. I think looking at the time, I don't want to get into anything too protracted here, because next time I want to get really more into your activities here at UCLA, which, of course, does unavoidably at some point lead us into your whole tenure story. But all my questions are big questions, so I think I will save those. But in closing, I guess the one thing I did want to ask is, raising your son in your neighborhood there in El Sereno and with all that's changed going on around you, I was curious to know how it appeared his experience growing up in virtually the same area

differed, or perhaps didn't differ, from your own, and particularly what you may have valued about allowing him to have that experience, which is maybe somewhat like your own experience.

Nakanishi

In one respect, he had a very similar experience. He participated very actively in the Japanese American athletic leagues. He went to Japanese language school for twelve years. My mother tutored him. He was a much better student than I was at Japanese. I took him to the [Homba Hongwanji] Buddhist Temple every Sunday, and he got to know his grandparents. There were many times when the grandfathers would take him to athletic things, or my mother would pick him up from school and take care of him before we got home, or whatever. And he did have these opportunities, like to go to Japan almost every year, because I sort of thought one reason I didn't take Japanese language all that seriously was because I couldn't see any reason to take it seriously. And yet, I thought if he sort of saw Japan, saw all the relatives, saw how in some ways Japan had changed, he would grow to like it and so forth.

I remember once when he was like twelve years or whatever, asking him, "What do you think about Japan and the U.S.? Do you think that they are more alike or more different?" And he said, "They're more alike." And I remember thinking to myself that I would have answered just the opposite when I was growing up, right?

Cline

Right.

Nakanishi

And yet, probably the most significant way in which his experience differed from mine--well, I guess two ways. I mean, one, was just his parents, that we didn't speak Japanese in the home. We weren't working class. We were much more connected people than my parents were. But the other just has to do with schooling. He first went to Pacific Oaks, which was a childcare school that was set up by the Quakers during World War II as like a statement of peace, and they believed in all this stuff, peace, multiculturalism, I mean everything. So he got the liberal kind of thinking pretty early on.

Cline

Is that in Pasadena?

Nakanishi

Yes. Because El Sereno is very close to Pasadena. And then he got into Pasadena Polytechnic [School] from first year on, and Polytechnic is a school that's over a hundred years old, across the street from Cal[ifornia Institute of] Tech[nology], and is essentially a white school. It has maybe at most 20 percent kids of color, mostly Asian, and if it really represented the demographics of the area, it'd be like 90 percent Asian. But it does give some preference to legacy, to kids of parents, to kids of kids, to kids who come from wealthy families and so forth, and it goes from pre-kindergarten all the way up to twelfth grade. And so my son had the opportunity to go there from first grade all the way to twelfth. It's a relatively small school. I think first grade was two classes of fifteen each, so thirty kids in a grade level, and then middle school I think had increased to sixty per grade level, and then it increased to, I believe, ninety at high school.

And particularly in high school--well, I should say throughout--I mean, it was the kind of, in a sense, education experience that we used to have in public schools, and so just like how I learned violin in second or third grade, at that school, every kid from first grade has to fiddle, okay? And every kid has to learn clarinet, I think, or one of the wind instruments from second grade. And from first grade, they also have an hour or two of Spanish language, okay, so all kind of things that, I don't know, I went through a lot of that, I mean, maybe not the Spanish part of it, foreign language, but clearly the music enrichment and other kinds of things.

And then when it gets to high school, it just becomes an unbelievably academically rigorous school. So my son took like twelve advanced-placement courses, and in his class, out of ninety, I mean, I don't know, about seven or eight go to Stanford, six or seven go to Yale, four or five go to Harvard, one or two go to Caltech. I mean, it is a very, very rigorous school. But they also have all this music and art going on, and theater, and my son did a lot of that. He happened to be at the right place at the right time and all that other stuff, when in Pasadena, at the Pasadena Presbyterian Church, they decided to start a children's chorus, and the music director there had some relationship with Polytechnic and recruited some of the students there, and instead of calling it the Pasadena Children's Chorus, they called it the Los Angeles Children's Chorus. So my son was in there from I think the second

year or so of the existence of this group, and stayed on and kept doing music and all that singing and so forth. But the L.A. Children's Chorus led to him going to Italy, to Australia, to every major venue here, Hollywood Bowl, Shrine [Auditorium], Dorothy Chandler [Pavilion], all that, to sing, because they were the Los Angeles Children's Chorus. So in that sense, he had to deal with some class issues much earlier, and some race issues much earlier than I had to.

Cline

Interesting. Were his friends, then, mostly from the school, or in the neighborhood, or both?

Nakanishi

Both, yes.

Cline

So he also had some Mexican American friends, just like you did. Well, that's cool. Great. And he was learning Spanish.

Nakanishi

[laughs] Well, then he learned French for middle school, and then he went to France for one summer. He really came back quite fluent. You must know this because you're a musician, but I mean, he can listen to a song and maybe after the second note kind of knows the song. I mean, I've heard various songs hundreds of times, and I still couldn't tell you if someone put me on the spot, so languages are also very, very easy for him.

Cline

Right. Well, then he's quadrilingual, it sounds like. Amazing. Okay, well, I'm going to say we're calling it for today. We'll set up another time to talk more. Thank you.

1.7. Session 7 (April 1, 2010)

Cline

Today is April 1, 2010. We're once again in the conference room in the College Library, also known as Powell Library, here at UCLA, Room 228. This is Alex Cline interviewing Don Nakanishi. This is, I believe, our seventh session.

Nakanishi

Wow.

Cline

Yes. But we're getting closer to the present day, slowly but surely. Last time we left off talking about you coming to UCLA, ultimately interviewing for and getting the job that was created in the School of Education, actually having to compete with your wife for the job, which must have been interesting.

So now we're essentially getting into the 1980s. This was a time when there was a lot of change in sort of the political face of the country, and I think in response to that, perhaps the face of the students here at UCLA; [President] Ronald [W.] Reagan, all of that fun stuff. You came to your position here with, I think, some extremely impressive and very solid background and credentials, as far as it goes, as you did, coming from Yale, coming from Harvard, doing your postdoc in Japan. You'd been teaching here for a while, and normally after a few years, I think--is it five years that's standard--there's this issue that comes up for professors, which is tenure. And normally, I would think that's always a bit of a--you can tell me--kind of an interesting, maybe a little dicey. I don't know if it's stressful, but it's a big question, and it's something that became a bigger question later, when tenure started to get much, much harder to receive from a university, when times grew tough and more insecure in more recent years.

What was the climate for tenure like at the time that you first came up for tenure in the 1980s here at UCLA?

Nakanishi

Well, it was not a certainty. There were other people, and particularly other minority scholars, who faced difficulties in getting tenure in their departments, and even after nearly twenty years of ethnic studies on this campus, ethnic studies was still not accepted by large parts of particularly the university's faculty. Many of us at that time were still the very first person of our ethnicity or whatever who were in a particular department, and oftentimes the very first to be doing research and teaching focused on issues of diversity and of minority communities, of issues that were important to them and so forth.

And many of us, even though the student body, I mean, as a result was also becoming increasingly students of color, and that had a lot to do with various kinds of advocacy that the students themselves had been doing for many, many years, community leaders, people in the state legislature who had been pushing for greater diversity,

as well as, obviously, faculty members here and administrators. So the student body was in the process of changing, and yet in many respects other parts of the campus, particularly the composition of the faculty and administration, but you might also say even the alumni, were not reflective of that diversity, nor the diversity of the residents of California.

For Asian Americans, the eighties was--I mean, I don't know, one could argue every decade is kind of significant in some way, but I think what differentiated that period in time was, one, the whole issue of Asian American admissions quotas first began to be raised. That was in the early 1980s, and it became, actually, a topic that I wrote extensively about and in part because I knew a lot about kind of very, very selective kinds of admissions procedures and policies and so forth through my involvement with Yale. I testified before legislative hearings, I did a lot of both scholarly as well as more policy and popular kind of writing on the topic, was interviewed a lot for it and so forth, but drawing analogies with what had happened with American Jews in relation to many of these same colleges. And then, I mean, the sort of unique kind of contribution I made to that debate were kind of twofold. I mean, one was just having had extensive knowledge of how those kinds of policies and procedures get instituted, how they get played out in selecting a class. The other was to really look at the politics behind all of that.

Asian Americans, the Asian American community was beginning to become more and more involved in electoral politics, and that was also another kind of focus of my attention. But I kind of viewed and wrote about the politics of the admissions kind of controversy and how both political parties felt that they had a stake in defending Asian Americans against discrimination and so forth. And so Ronald Reagan was as much on the side of Asian Americans and these quotas and everything else as California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown and others who were Democrats, who were also defending Asian Americans. That, in turn, launched some investigations by the State of California, particularly of UC [University of California] Berkeley, and by the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education for UCLA and Harvard.

So this is nothing we've ever been able to prove, but a lot of people have kind of argued that a lot of my activities in relation--I mean, a

lot of my difficulties in relation to tenure kind of stem from my involvement in this kind of admissions stuff, okay.

Cline

I see.

Nakanishi

The other is clearly that the Asian American community in general begins to become much more focused on electoral politics. Many more people are running for office. More money is raised to help candidates. And for Japanese Americans, a process which had really started around the time when ethnic studies centers and so forth, like the one here, were started in 1969, there was kind of a parallel thing of both very, very public kinds of activities, the most public being to try to seek a national apology and monetary reparations for what had happened to Japanese Americans during World War II, and the other very, very kind of private, very, very community-centered, family centered, which was to have, particularly those who had gone through the camps, to begin to talk about it, to begin to share, in a sense, their experiences, the lessons they learned, in many ways the trauma that they had experienced.

So throughout the eighties, particularly among Japanese Americans, you found efforts being directed both kind of outwardly, publicly, politically, in relation to the camps, and yet on the other hand to do more private things, like going on pilgrimages, to having sort of people of my generation sort of asking our parents, "What happened? And how did this event have an impact on you and the family?" and so forth, and for us to kind of begin to kind of understand sort of what they had gone through.

Cline

And maybe begin to heal a bit.

Nakanishi

Yes. So that also became an area that I did a lot of writing in. I enjoyed my teaching, in both the School of Education--I was teaching a class on minority education and cross-cultural perspective, I was teaching this class on designing dissertations and so forth, and had just a wonderfully diverse group of students, students from Iran, students from Asia, Africa, as well as minority students, and particularly a lot of Caucasian former teachers, who had either gone into the Peace Corps or other kinds of experiences that sort of exposed them to the world and so forth.

And then in Asian American Studies, I had the opportunity to continue to teach this class for master's students, for them to design their master's theses, and so I taught this one core course for thirty years, that started in the 1970s, and taught for almost thirty years every master's student who had gone through our program. Many of them went on to get Ph.D.'s, who became scholars in the field. Others became writers, others became community leaders and activists and so forth, and so it was a great opportunity to play a role, in that sense.

Then I also did a lot of things out in the community, as well as just professionally, in relation to either political science or Asian American Studies, as well as sort of working with different community groups here, and those groups, I mean, were not just Asian American. There were all types of different groups that I was working with at that time.

So in 1986, I go up for tenure. I don't know how much I need to really go into all the details. There are some articles and dissertations and so forth that describe some of the steps that I had to go through in terms of compiling my dossier--at the ed school, you actually meet with the committee that's going to evaluate you, write up your report and so forth--and then all of the things that start to happen which are really tremendous deviations from normal practice. That in turn leads to my filing of the first of several grievances with the Academic Senate Committee on Privilege and Tenure, of establishing a prima facie case of procedural irregularities and bias. Eventually, it leads to the dean of the School of Education, a guy named Lou Solomon, from participating any more in my case, because of things that he had done and things that were uncovered.

It goes to initial rejection of tenure promotion and reconsideration on my part of various other things, and this case eventually goes on for three years, and it after a while, I mean, just becomes this very, very large campaign, and there comes a point where, I mean, I just don't take this personally. I mean, I become, if nothing else, I mean, a symbol, and people are talking about this person, Don Nakanishi, but both favorably and maybe not so favorably. I gather together a great group of attorneys who help me, led by a longtime civil rights attorney named Dale Minami, from San Francisco, who had worked on the sort of overturning of the Fred Korematsu case,

a quorum novus case; and a classmate of mine from Yale, Bill Lann Lee, who was the assistant attorney general for civil rights under Bill [William J.] Clinton; Dick Osumi was a long-time civil rights attorney here in Los Angeles; Cas [Casimiro] Tolentino.

I must have had about two hundred years worth of legal experience with me, but Dale was the principal attorney, and then there were just all of these other people, I mean, whether they were students, whether they were scholars in the field, whether they were community leaders, Asian American, American Jewish, Chicano, labor. Tom Bradley was a very, very strong supporter. I think I had mentioned that I had worked for Tom Bradley, to help set up his campaign right before I started at the ed school. Well, I got to know Tom, and every time he came on campus, or every time he would meet Chuck [Charles E.] Young, he would ask them, "What are you doing about Don Nakanishi's case?"

Cline

Wow. I was going to ask you about the Chuck factor.

Nakanishi

There were people in the state legislature, people in Congress, I mean just amazing. I still remember, I guess it was about two years out of this three years, when the students had a big march on campus, and I'm telling Dale what the students had done that day, and this is in the context of all of these phone calls to the chancellor, of letter writing, of petitions, of stories in the "L.A. [Los Angeles] Times" and you name it. And Dale says, "Shoot, Don. Forget this tenure stuff. Why don't you run for Congress?" [Cline laughs] So the case really became kind of a barometer for how ethnic studies and faculty diversity was being played out here on this campus.

There are a number of grad students who later on--as well as assistant professors--were telling me, "If you don't get tenure, I'm just going to quit." I mean, it sends the signal that what we want to do and our interests and so forth are not being supported and so forth on this campus. So that was the case. It had an unusual ending to it.

Cline

Well, before we get to the ending, backing up a bit, when you were first denied tenure, I wanted to try to get at what your feelings were, and if your feelings were already colored by some sense of

irregularities in this process, or if that happened after the rejection and your coming to terms with what that meant, how that played out, and particularly just what your--especially after you'd come here, you'd invested all this effort and skill into this--what your feelings were when this happened.

Nakanishi

Well, the irregularities happened at a very early stage in my review. At the ed school, the chair of the department, solely or in consultation with the dean, appoints a three-member faculty committee, and usually tradition was that those three members would be from the same sort of area of the ed school as you were, would be able as experts to be able to evaluate your research and so forth, and that they are asked to read your materials, read your teacher evaluations and so forth, and that you have this opportunity to meet with them and to ask them questions, to even seek advice from them on like how to write your self-statement and so forth. And they in turn are supposed to write a report and then they make a presentation to the faculty, okay. And university procedures are such that after you gather all your materials, they evaluate, they write a report, you sit down with the chair of the department, and the chair tells you sort of what's in your file, what the evaluation is, the points that are being raised, and you have this opportunity to make corrections, to rebut certain kinds of misstatements or whatever, and then you actually sign this statement that says, yes, I was notified what was in there and either I've written this rebuttal or everything's okay, and so let's go forward and let's have a vote, okay?

Well, I had a three-member committee, and two of the members were very familiar with my work and were in a position to be able to evaluate it. Those were Professor John Hawkins and Professor Val Rust. The person who was made the chair is a guy named Burton Clark. He passed away about a year or two years ago, and, ironically, I mean, I just got a desk at the emeriti sort of office at the ed school, and lo and behold, whose desk am I taking over but Burton Clark's, okay. Burton Clark was the chair, and so again, I submitted my materials. They also solicited letters from scholars outside of UCLA. So I meet with them and they ask me some questions, and then I say, "Well, is everything okay? I mean, is there anything I can do, like rewrite certain portions of my self-

statement, or articles maybe I shouldn't include there because, whatever?" And they said, "No. Just don't worry about it, and just expect some good news in the spring," because it takes about nine months to do an evaluation. So I thought everything was fine.

Cline

You definitely didn't see any writing on the wall at that point.

Nakanishi

Right, right. So a faculty meeting is held for the tenured faculty at the ed school, and they have a discussion, apparently, and they take a vote, and then afterwards, typically the department chair gives you a call and kind of tells you what's happened, okay? And they're not supposed to say, "Well, you got fifteen yeses and five nos," but they're generally supposed to tell you, "You got unanimous, you got near unanimous," whatever, "You didn't do well," I don't know, but kind of sort of general sort of statements of maybe how the vote went and maybe some of the issues that were raised.

So I got a call from the department chair, who tells me that, "Well, I'm sort of sorry to tell you, but the vote did not go as well as we would have expected. Why don't you come in and we can talk, and I'll tell you what happened?" So I am, like, floored. Right? I'm trying to figure out what the heck happened here, right? So I call up various faculty members that were friends of mine, and I kind of asked, "Can you tell me or shed some light on what happened at the faculty meeting?" And they're supposed to be confidential about all of this, okay, and for the most part they really did not reveal anything at that stage, although I happened to reach the wife of one faculty member, who had heard what had happened at the faculty meeting. She sort of said, "Well, can't really tell you what happened, but when you go and talk to the department chair, ask if your chair was there," namely Professor Burton Clark. I thought, well, that's a strange thing to ask, but okay, I will.

So I go and see the next day the department chair. Her name is Norma Feshbach, and I wasn't particularly close to Norma during the previous years, nor would I consider her not to be friendly towards me or whatever, at least in a kind of casual way, and there's nothing for me to believe that the dean didn't like me or whatever, and the same could be true with Burton Clark too, okay? Burton Clark had come two years before from Yale, and so we had

talked a little about Yale and all that stuff, okay. So Norma Feshbach's telling me what had transpired and said that there were some people who praised what you had done and so forth, in your various kinds of scholarship and your teaching, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. "However, there were issues raised," and I forget if she even identified very many of them, "so in the end, a large number of the faculty decided not to support you for tenure." Okay. So I found that--I didn't know quite what to make of that.

But I remembered what the wife of the faculty member told me, so I asked, "Was Burton Clark there? And how did he present my case?" Okay, because as chair, he's supposed to present the case to the rest of the faculty, say, "We've looked through all the files," and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And so she says, "Oh, he wasn't there. But the other members of the committee were, and I think they did an adequate job." Okay? So I don't quite still know what to make of this.

So I think shortly thereafter, I went and talked to a member of the faculty--I'm sure I did--that same day, and finally one of them broke with confidentiality and said, "Do you know what happened yesterday?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. I've just heard that it didn't go well and that Burton Clark wasn't there at the meeting, but that Hawkins and Rust had done an okay job of presenting my case." They said, "Well, did you know that the dean attended the meeting?" This is the first time a dean had ever attended a faculty meeting, although he's perfectly okay in doing that, okay, but usually a dean is an independent reviewer in a tenure case, okay. So it's like, gee, this person has two opportunities, right, to whatever, I mean take a vote or whatever, have some impact.

"Well, the dean was there, which was unusual, but which was more unusual was that the dean read a statement from your chair, who said that after reviewing your case, he felt that you should not get tenure."

I'm floored. I don't know what to kind of expect, okay. And so this was not like something that--Norma Feshbach didn't tell me what had happened, right? And this kind of stuff normally would be kept confidential, okay. I mean, faculty members think that they could get away with anything that happens, right, in kind of that sort of setting. So that then allowed me to go and sort of see again some of my friends on the faculty who had attended the meeting, and I

said, "What do you make of this?" That's where many of the more experienced faculty, who had been there twenty, thirty years, say, "This was completely unprecedented," okay, "one, that a dean would appear, and not just appear but play this active role," okay, "and second, that the chair of your committee--," I mean, he had the opportunity, if he wanted to be critical, to put it all into that report and to allow me the opportunity to respond to it, right, before the meeting. So it kind of blindsided all that.

Cline

Right. In absentia, on top of it.

Nakanishi

Yes. So that's where I make my first visit to this academic senate committee, and they can see right through this stuff. They call up the dean, and they also call up at that time the vice chancellor for academic personnel [affairs], a guy named Harold Horowitz, and they tell him, "Let's correct this before it gets any worse," right? "So let's start from square one. Let's take another vote," and so forth. And so, like I said, the problems start from there, and the question is whether that screws up the entire process, okay.

Cline

Yes, whether it's tainted beyond repair.

Nakanishi

And at that stage, they simply sort of warn the dean and the chair, I mean, they don't quite know what's happening here, and maybe it's just Burton Clark being Burton Clark or something, right. So that's where it starts. Another vote is taken. It's a much stronger vote, a positive vote, but definitely the faculty have become polarized. Well, we then learn--so the process goes on, and in some ways, Burton Clark is totally discredited by that stage, right. And the case goes forward, which is, namely, after that meeting, the second meeting and the second vote, Norma Feshbach calls me in, tells me what happened and so forth, offers me an opportunity to respond, and I forget if I responded or not--I probably did--to whatever negative kind of things were there, and then the case sort of moves forward. Well, what it means to move forward is that the chair of the department has an opportunity to--does write a report, and can write a report on sort of what transpired at the meeting, and kind of say, "This is what happened. That's it. I support it," or can also write a more personal statement and so forth, okay. The chair of

the department also is supposed to nominate three potential faculty members from the department who can represent the case, that particular person's case, before a campus-wide, what's called an ad-hoc committee, which is usually composed of one person from the department and three other people who have similar kinds of knowledge or whatever. So you wouldn't find an English teacher judging a physics person, or whatever, okay. So there has to be a little semblance of knowledge and so forth.

Then the dean also has an opportunity to write a statement, reviews the file, writes a statement, and then it goes before the Committee on Academic Personnel, and that's a twelve-, thirteen-member committee, and they evaluate, and then it goes to the chancellor's side of things, and they sort of look at all that and make a decision. So it proceeds and it goes forward, and they decide, well, it's negative, okay. So that's where I get turned down the first time. In the meantime, I'm talking with Dale Minami and others, and so if the negative thing happens, well, at least that's an option, to kind of do something legally. Dale does tell me that most tenure cases do not result in positive decisions when they go to court, because people in juries, judges and so forth, don't understand what's involved with tenure and stuff. He said, "If you're going to do anything, it's got to be something more political than all of that. We can still do all of the sort of semi-legal stuff, which you have to, which is like naming, exhausting all internal remedies, which is like filing grievances," with the--all that. "But if this ever goes to court, chance are you're not going to be successful."

So after I get the news that I'm being turned down, I sort of tell my wife, "I don't know. What do you think I should do? My feeling is to fight this. I've been involved with trying to develop Asian American Studies for twenty years, and if I'm going to go out, I'm going to go out with a bang and not a whimper," as T.S. Eliot would say, right. And so my wife raises a question, "What are you willing to live with?" That's where I weighed different things, and in my mind, I've put too much into trying to develop this field, and too much just to develop my own interests and skills and so forth, that, well, I'm going to do it, I'm going to fight this.

Cline

Had you weighed the option of in the process becoming somewhat of a symbol yourself?

Nakanishi

Oh, I didn't even know what was going to happen at that stage, okay?

Cline

Okay.

Nakanishi

I mean, sort of soon afterwards there was a story in the local Japanese American newspaper, the "Rafu Shimpo" and so forth, and my mother sees it and she's saying, "Don't do this. Go sell insurance," or something, right. So I then tell various people that I'm going to contest this. I'm going to, one, pursue, which was perfectly open to me, which was a process called reconsideration based on new evidence, which means you present like new articles that you've written or awards you've received or something that wasn't in the initial file. And the other was to file a grievance, a formal grievance that there were some procedural errors or something, a bias that occurred in that first go-around.

Cline

Now, before you describe what happened then, were you pretty much decided at this point what was really going on in this denial of your tenure?

Nakanishi

No.

Cline

You were kind of fishing for what smelled fishy still at this point?

Okay.

Nakanishi

Well, I hear the denial in June of 1987. The case started in the fall of 1986 and took nine months, and I get a denial before June thirtieth, which is like the magic date when you're supposed to--

Cline

Right, end of the fiscal year.

Nakanishi

But I'm still going to be able to have like another year or whatever, no matter what. That's when I begin to tell various people that I'm going to contest this, and we're trying to figure out how to craft, in a sense, this grievance. So, one, John Hawkins, who was a member of that committee, John had been a former head of the Department of Education and had been a member of the faculty for over fifteen

years by that stage. He tells me that it was out of tradition, all right, and that's a big thing in law, okay. What is normally done? What is custom? What is tradition, right? But it was out of tradition that the chair of your committee would kind of go against you, I mean, if anything, the person that had every opportunity to put it all into the report and so forth.

I also find out that tradition is that the three people, who are nominated by the chair to represent you before this ad-hoc committee, are typically people who are either on your ad-hocs, who are familiar with your publications and all that other stuff, and/or people in your area, or people who reflect the vote, okay. I also hear from a faculty member who actually sat on the four-member ad-hoc committee--so all these people are like breaking with confidentiality, because they think something really rotten went on. So one of the four members, who was not in the Department of Education, tells me that the representative from the School of Education was an opponent of mine, who argued against tenure. Okay? So, one, that meant the person didn't reflect the vote. But, two, it probably meant the person was not in my area and probably didn't know anything about kinds of stuff that I research and taught.

And he said that, moreover, what happened--and because he had also seen the reports--there are reports that each of these sort of committees writes, and those reports are given to me when I'm denied and so forth, and I still have an opportunity to respond to them or whatever--he had seen what the vice chancellor had given me, and in the report of this ad-hoc committee, the original report had said that the members of the committee, except for that member in the School of Education, believe that Nakanishi was being railroaded, that in an unprecedented move, that a letter from the dean of the Graduate School of Education appeared in my file, okay. I mean, they're reviewing, right, all these, whatever, different letters and my publications. Suddenly this letter appears from the dean, telling the ad-hoc committee that they should not support my tenure and giving different reasons for it, okay? So not only was the dean at the department meeting; now he's trying to influence this committee. And we figured the person who planted that letter was the person who was from the School of Education, okay.

Cline

Right. What were the reasons in the letter?

Nakanishi

I don't know. But the committee went out of its way to say that it was completely flabbergasted by this. And, of course, the vice chancellor for academic affairs took it out, so I never saw that statement. But this faculty member tells me this is what happened, okay, and that he had seen what the vice chancellor had sent to me, and that that statement was out of there, including their statement that the dean had tried to intervene in this case, which they found unprecedented. I asked this faculty member if he remembered the name of this faculty member who represented the School of Education, and he looks through the catalog, and he identifies this person, and this person was in the area of research methodology, knew nothing about issues of race and ethnicity, was a very good friend of the dean, okay.

So given all of this, right, my principal attorney, Dale Minami, drafts up this grievance to Committee on Privilege and Tenure. It looks like a lawsuit, but that's just format, right? So he makes all of these sort of allegations, and he instructs the Committee on Academic Personnel if they could do the following. He said that, one, sort of by custom, that the chair of the department nominates three people to be potential people on this ad-hoc committee that have these characteristics, (a), (b), (c), and if they would look to see who the department chair had nominated, and if they did not have these characteristics, and more importantly, if they were x, y, and z professors, who we knew were opponents, that that should tell you something, okay.

Another point was that if they were to compare the statement or the, whatever, reports that the vice chancellor for academic affairs had given me, as opposed to the original letter, if there were these missing things there about the involvement of the dean and how the dean was trying to influence this committee, that should also be a reflection of bias and procedure irregularities and so forth. And also, that they could talk to professor x, y, and z, whatever, in the Department of Education, and to determine whether it has ever been the case that a dean of the School of Education attends a meeting of the Department of Education. I mean, so all these different things that this committee could easily just go and see.

And so, of course, they did, and they found all of that. They found that the three people that the chair had nominated were all opponents, had no expertise and all this, and so they then disqualified the dean from being involved in the case, the reprimand the department chair. They can't pull her out, because they need somebody to work this process for another vote and everything else. So that's how that whole thing--

Cline

Wow. So what about your feelings about this, in terms of not only your confidence in the institution and in your department and all of that, but your relationship with your peers now and with this polarity very much in existence now, and this, what I would think, growing kind of contentious atmosphere surrounding the whole process--how did it feel to come to work every day for a while?

Nakanishi

I felt okay, as I recall, because I had a lot of supporters in the School of Ed, I mean, a lot of faculty members. In the end, not only did we file this sort of grievance, but we also said, "You can go and talk to these fifteen professors--", like ten of them I think were in the School of Ed, and others were involved in the process--"who can shed some light on what had transpired." And so they all kind of broke confidentiality to talk about the unfairness. I don't know. As somebody who's studied discrimination and prejudice over the years, I mean, this was nothing. I mean, this wasn't a hate crime, this wasn't racial violence or whatever. We also heard from some people who worked on the staff of the School of Ed, who had like offices close by to the dean and to the department chair, and they had overheard them talking about me as a "fat Jap," and stuff like that. Right?

Cline

Wow.

Nakanishi

And I mean, I just said, I am so pissed off. I mean, and that became part--that was in the grievance too. So you'd sort of think that after all these years that--

Cline

Yes, you would.

Nakanishi

And so, I mean, I wasn't afraid of these people.

Cline

So now you know where the smell is coming from.

Nakanishi

But, you know, the case kept going to the chancellor, and the chancellor at any time over the course of three years could have stopped this whole thing and just granted tenure. But I figure Chuck Young was doing what a chancellor has to do until it just becomes unreasonable to do it anymore, which was, namely, to back a dean. And it's not just a dean. It sort of sends a signal to all the other deans, whether you've got their back or not. And so even with winning these grievances and so forth, I think the chancellor was willing to overlook all that and just throw it back into the process, take more votes, I mean, all that kind of stuff.

Cline

Not wanting to appear as the supreme leader, so to speak. And the students got involved in this as well. What form did that take, and how did you feel about that?

Nakanishi

Well, I was very touched by the fact that students would support me in that way and I guess would be doing things that I would have done too as a student. But when I was initially turned down in June of 1987, they held a candlelight vigil, and they walked over to the chancellor's office, I mean chancellor's house, and they put candles on his front door, and they kept organizing students across the country. They had the student government here passing resolutions every year calling for tenure. They held rallies. There were days when the students would have these various kinds of marches or whatever in Sacramento over student fees or affirmative action or whatever, and they took that opportunity to go and talk with various members of the legislature. But they played a really key role.

Cline

Made the paper.

Nakanishi

I think in turn, the controversy over tenure also kind of served to jumpstart, I mean, various organizations too, and it was like one of the first things that they did when they were organizing. I don't know, I mean, it had a lot of different benefits, I guess.

Cline

Right. It's something to unite behind.

Nakanishi

But I mean after a while, like I said, I really couldn't take it all that personally. I did know that after a while that I had to keep doing my work. I had to keep writing, keep publishing, keep teaching, because at any stage, whoever wanted to discredit me or whatever could say, "Well, look. He's not publishing anymore." Or, "Gee, look at his teaching record now," and so forth. So it really meant that I had to keep doing all of that, and I had to still kind of participate in terms of providing, whatever, information for grievances and things like that. So it was a job in itself, I mean, to keep that kind of going.

Cline

Right. Because this hit the press too. I mean, this is where the symbol part comes in, or celebrity even.

Nakanishi

Yes. And I think it's also important to say here that when I went through my tenure difficulties, I was--and I really consider it to have been fortunate enough to have received all of this support, and for my case to have been the basis for a lot of people mobilizing. But at the same time, there are like four or five other tenure cases involving Asian Americans, and they were all women. None of them were sort of in a field that you might call critical of academia, like ethnic studies, okay. There was a woman in psychology at UC Santa Barbara. There was an architecture professor at UC Berkeley. There was a medical professor at University of Iowa, and perhaps the most famous case was that of Rosalie [L.] Tung, who was a professor at the Wharton School of Business at University of Pennsylvania. They all challenged their denial of tenure in a very, very private, individual way. I mean, they maybe had a few students who supported them or whatever, but they had very, very valiant kind of fights.

And I say that Rosalie Tung had the most significant one, because she was denied tenure, and she alleged that the dean of the Wharton School of Business had made sexual overtures toward her, and she didn't go for that, and that when she went up for tenure that he did everything possible to, in all confidentiality, right, to deny her tenure. She filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission, the federal government, and she wanted personnel

records and so forth from the Wharton School of Business to support or, whatever, refute her argument that, one, her record of teaching and publications and so forth was equal to if not better than all of these other professors, particularly white men who had received tenure in the last four or five years, and that the composition of her committee within the Wharton School was all orchestrated to lead to a negative report and so forth.

So the Equal Opportunity Commission then becomes, in a sense, her whatever, not only advocate, but to investigate this situation, and they go and tell University of Pennsylvania, "Okay, we want to see these documents," and so forth. At that time University of Pennsylvania says, "No, we're not going to give them to you. A university is different than a corporation or a law firm or whatever. We have certain privileges. We have this tradition of confidentiality and so forth, and so we're not going to give you these materials."

Cline

When was this, exactly?

Nakanishi

I think the case was decided--I'm trying to think if the case was decided while mine was going on. It was happening in the same period, so whether it got decided by '90 or whatever, I don't know. But it eventually goes up to the U.S. Supreme Court, and University of Pennsylvania's lawyers say the same thing. "We're special, and you can't have them." And the U.S. Supreme Court in a unanimous decision says, "You're no different in a case of discrimination," and so forth. "You give these files. You can redact them and take out like, whatever, certain kinds of personal stuff in there, but otherwise, you've got to give these records to this agency so that they can do this investigation." And that, in a sense, requires all of higher education to give these kinds of redacted, if not complete, reports or whatever, when somebody is being evaluated and requests them.

And yet my case sort of reveals that if you leave the redacting to somebody who's defending the university, that they can take out certain kinds of things that obviously could benefit the person. But like I said, during the same time I was going through my thing, that you found all these other Asian American women who were going through things. After my case was decided, until now, I must have been called by a hundred and fifty, two hundred professors across

the country, just to get some advice. The vast majority are not in areas of criticism or whatever, like women's studies or ethnic studies or whatever. Most are in physics and business and psychology and so forth, and they're people of color or they are women, and when you hear their stories, you sort of think there must be this little book that says, ten different ways to criticize somebody's scholarship, and more importantly, that there probably is something there, but the faculty members who may have witnessed it are not coming forward and helping this person.

Cline

How much do you think this perception of ethnic studies and related fields played into your situation?

Nakanishi

Oh, I think it played a lot at that time. I mean in my case, I presented a lot of publications and things, and it's very easy, I mean, to criticize people's works. I mean, if you do qualitative research, well, quantitative people can go after it in a certain way. If you do quantitative research, the qualitative people can raise all of these different kinds of issues. If you're doing research in which, in a sense, you are gathering and producing your data, because it's just not readily available, it's not like going to a database with the census and finding, in a sense, the answers, the data that you want. Well, that's a whole 'nother thing too, in how much time it takes and so forth.

Cline

So how did it end?

Nakanishi

Okay. How long are we going? [laughter] I don't think it'll take that long, okay.

Cline

Okay. We've got time.

Nakanishi

I guess it's just within the last few months, ever since I was approaching retirement in November of 2009, that I decided that just like you probably shouldn't take secrets to the grave, that you shouldn't take secrets into retirement. So I started telling a story of how the case came to an end in a couple of interviews, and then I have told the story to a couple of larger sort of public gatherings. I do it in part because I think it's, one, sort of important for people to

understand how the case did come to an end. It's important for people who really do not work with particularly university administrators and presidents, to kind of know sometimes how they think and behave.

And so I just sort of hope that there are things that people can kind of learn from this episode, and also, I think, to just praise my attorney, Dale Minami. I always wondered what good attorneys were, but I did learn through particularly this one episode, the tremendous value that a very experienced, very sort of righteous kind of attorney, a civil rights attorney could have in a case like this, that I simply could not have done on my own.

The case comes to an end in May of 1989, and I think it's in April of '89--yes, I'm sure it's April of '89--when the case finally comes back to Chancellor Charles Young. This is about the third or fourth time that it has come back to him, and there really is no more process left. He just can't go and get another vote. He can't give it to another committee, nothing. The case is finally on his desk.

The members of the California Legislature had been interested in my case for a long time, and some members of that legislature are part of a committee, I don't know if it's a higher-ed committee, a ways and means committee, whatever, and this is in the California Assembly. They suddenly get this funding bill to build, either in whole or in part, the new Anderson [Graduate] School of Business [Management] building, and I believe it was for sixty million dollars. And they decide that it is time to end the case. So it's people like Bob [Robert] Campbell, oh, gee, Elihu Harris, but various members of the legislature. Like I said, they once signed a joint letter, like thirty of them, calling for tenure, and many of them had called the chancellor over the years. So the UC lobbyist in Sacramento, and I forget his name, catches wind of all of this, and I guess he tells the UCLA officials, and particularly the chancellor, that this has happened.

So I get a call from the chancellor, and he says that he's going to be up in San Francisco the next few days to attend a Board of Regents meeting, and he knows that Dale Minami is based in San Francisco, and whether he and I could meet with him up there. I said, "Sure. Let me see how Dale's schedule is," and so forth, and it's okay with Dale, so we make plans to meet with the chancellor up there. So I fly up and I have lunch with Dale, and Dale asks me, "What kind of

guy is Chuck Young?" And I said, "Well, he's a real big guy. He's about six-three, six-four, I don't know, very muscular, husky, and he has a reputation for intimidating people just by his stature. The 'L.A. Times' has never written a negative story of UCLA while he's been chancellor." Maybe it had something to do with Franklin [P.] Murphy being there too, right? "But UCLA has really had a negative story. But the rumor is that when someone was trying to write something kind of negative, that he invited this one reporter to his office and just kind of slammed his hand on the desk and said, 'You can't write that kind of stuff about us,' or something, and completely intimidated her, and she didn't write it."

I said, "The other thing," I said, "he's also a native Californian, and he became chancellor at a very, very young age. He sort of takes credit for these ethnic studies centers. He was the chancellor at that time." And I said, "I guess the other thing is I've heard that he's only good for about ten minutes on a topic, because he has so many things he has to kind of know, right, I mean as chancellor and everything." So Dale takes that all in, and we go to the Board of Regents meeting, and I forget where it was held, but, man, it just felt like we were in a bunker. We had to go through these armed guards and everything, and we go into like this basement area, and we go into a room that looks like a seminar room. Dale and I sort of wait there, and somebody, one of his assistants from the chancellor's office comes in and says, "The chancellor is," whatever, "talking to the regents right now, but as soon as he's finished, he'll come join you."

So, of course, we're waiting for about ten, fifteen minutes, and then the chancellor comes in. He has a smile on his face, and he shakes our hands, and he sits across from us and he says, "Well, thank you for coming. Before we get started, I want to get something off my chest." He then starts to say that he has been chancellor for twenty-five years, and in those twenty-five years he's never had a case like this. He's had people from the legislature, Tom Bradley, the donors, so forth, calling him up at all hours, many of them calling him a racist and so forth, and kind of talking like that. And then Dale, the first of several times, interrupts him, and he tells the chancellor, "Well, you know that Professor Nakanishi has nothing to do with this." And the chancellor's a little startled, and he said, "Oh,

I'm not accusing him or you of orchestrating any of this, but my apologies if that's how it sounds."

So he keeps going on, and he talks about how difficult the case has been and so forth. He's read the newspapers, and he's seen all these letters that have come in and so forth, and he just can't believe the things that are said about him and about UCLA and so forth. So he goes on for about ten minutes on this. Then he stops and he says, "Well, I'm sorry, but I just really had to get that off my chest. So why don't we get started?" And I remember thinking at that moment that maybe it was my personality, maybe it was the way in which I was trained as an academic or whatever, and just the difference of stature, I mean, a chancellor versus assistant prof, that when somebody kind of apologizes and kind of says, "Let's move on," and so forth, okay, yes, let's do that, right?

Well, not Mr. Minami. Mr. Minami says, "Well, before we get started, I've got something I want to get off my chest." And I'm thinking to myself, oh, my god. And he starts off by saying, "You know, I've been a civil rights attorney for twenty-five years, and I've never seen a case like this either." And he goes on to say--and I think he's playing, at that time, to how he thinks a white sort of sheltered Californian would perceive Asian Americans. So he says, "The Asian American community really hasn't been involved in politics very much over the years, so that's why maybe they are doing certain things that seem a little out of the ordinary." He said, "You also have to remember that the Japanese American community has just gone through this two-decades-long process of trying to come to grips with what happened to them, a hundred and twenty thousand of them, during World War II, in seeking redress and apology and so forth, as I'm sure you read in Professor Nakanishi's award-winning articles." [laughter]

And he goes on, and he says, "That's why the community leaders and so forth, they see one of their best and brightest, and after he's won these two grievances and eliminated like the dean and the chair from even being reviewed, part of the review, and then for this case to come to you three or four times and you do nothing, and you just keep putting it back into the process, well, they're tremendously offended, and they really think that there's a lot of discrimination now happening, a big cover-up," okay? "You also have to remember that Professor Nakanishi is a Los Angeles native,

and people know him out in the community. He's very active in the community, has been ever since high school, and that's why you have just not Asian Americans, it's Mexican Americans, it's American Jews, it's labor, it's Tom Bradley, it's all these people that are coming to support him," and so forth.

And he talks about how he was part of a very early effort to create ethnic studies up at Berkeley, and he remembers how much resistance there was, and how much there still is so much resistance to ethnic studies, to admissions, affirmative action and all this stuff. So Dale just goes on for about ten minutes, and then he says, "Well, I'm sorry. I had to get that off my chest." And I was like saying, I don't know, man. That was really righteous, Dale, but I don't know, man.

And so the first thing the chancellor says--and he looks at us, and you could tell, I mean, he has taken just this huge hit from Dale, right. He says, "You know, there are all kinds of white people in this world. There are good white people and there are bad white people, and I consider myself to be one of the good white people." And when he said that, I said, I think I have tenure. [laughter]

Cline

And when you said it now, I, a white person, thought, ew, come on. Wow. Okay, sorry.

Nakanishi

And he said, "I supported redress for Japanese Americans in the last few years. I still remember when I was little and my friends were taken away from Riverside," or whatever, "and had to go into the camps," and so forth. "So I know what happened to the Japanese American people." So he's very, very apologetic, and it's like, wow. I mean, like he had never looked at this case kind of in this way, I mean, that he had sort of been badgered, right, for three years, and people had called him names and everything else, and he really couldn't see past that, okay. And at some stage he says, "Now, I don't believe in horse trading, but we have this--I've got this sort of concern here about the Anderson School of Business, and then we have this situation on the other hand with Professor Nakanishi's tenure. Now, I don't believe in horse trading, and I know that you guys aren't responsible for any of this, but if there's a way to communicate with people who have something to do with the Anderson School, I will try my best to see what we can do in terms

of Professor Nakanishi's tenure. And if we can perhaps touch base again in a week, we'll see where we stand with things."

So a week passes, and by then the legislature, legislative committee makes known that they are willing to support this funding bill, and then the chancellor conveys to us that he has made arrangements so that I will get tenure. He calls a press conference, issues a press release saying that, whatever, that I've been granted tenure and so forth, and that's how the case came to an end.

Cline

Wow. Politics encapsulated.

Nakanishi

[laughs] So nobody--I mean, for twenty-some-odd years, I mean, I kept that pretty much a secret. And yet like I said at the outset, it really showed me that what Dale did was something I would not have done or could not have done, and so I have just enormous respect for his smarts, I guess, in trying to size up the situation and really, whatever, persuading the chancellor.

The following year there was a national search for the director of the Asian American Studies Center and then I forget the name of the professor in sociology who was chair of the committee, and I was selected as the number one candidate.

Cline

You walked right into my question, because it's right on the heels of this.

Nakanishi

I felt both obligated to do it, as well as something that I wanted to do. When I was selected, the committee makes its recommendation, gives it to the chancellor's office, and in particular at that time, the person who was going to negotiate with me was Murray Schwartz, who was the executive vice chancellor at the time, and I didn't know Murray. The one interaction that we sort of had was during the third year of my tenure case, Harold Horowitz, who was the vice chancellor for academic affairs, had a heart attack or something, or a mild heart attack, I don't know, but was hospitalized, and we sent him flowers, even though he was like, whatever, our foe. And Murray and Harold were very, very close friends. They had been law professors for many, many years together, and so I don't know, he seemed to be very touched by that whole thing.

So I began negotiations with Murray on becoming director, and probably the easiest thing is to negotiate for yourself, to say, "Oh, I want a new computer, I want a new desk," and all that stuff. "I want summer nights," whatever, and that's the easiest thing I think you can negotiate for. It's harder to negotiate for a program and programmatic needs. So I gathered together all the Asian American Studies faculty at that time, and there are about five or six of us on campus, and I said, "What do we need?" And they said, "We need more faculty. We're never going to grow. We're overworked and everything else. We have a growing number of students and still a small number of faculty."

So that's what I began to bargain over, faculty positions. I didn't know whether I could work with Murray. Murray didn't know me, as well as other people--Ray [Raymond L.] Orbach, who was the provost of the college, I mean all these people; Andrea Rich. I didn't know whether I could work with these people, and I figured they didn't really know me.

Cline

But they knew who you were.

Nakanishi

I mean, I was a symbol. I was a symbol.

Cline

Exactly.

Nakanishi

So we negotiated for six months, and I kept going back and forth, and it all had to do with FTEs [full-time equivalents], or I would ask for some discretionary money, all that, and in the end, I was able to secure ten new faculty positions. I think at that time, given the climate on campus, given how long it had taken the center to have filled the first six FTEs, and also having given my own experience of trying to get tenure the year before, they probably thought they could have given us thirty FTEs and we wouldn't have been able to fill them, okay. But we eventually settled on ten, and we made them live up to their commitment, and we filled all ten over the years, and after a while, the climate on campus changed and departments started to hire their own Asian American specialists without our having to give them a faculty position for it.

I remember asking my wife once why it was that we had gotten this extraordinary number of faculty positions. My wife has been a

longtime administrator with the Cal[ifornia] State University system, and I don't know whether this is the right assessment or not, but her thought was, "Well, it's because they're afraid of you." I said, "Why are they afraid of me? I'm a nice guy and everything." And she said, "Well, they're afraid of you because you beat the chancellor, and nobody ever beats the chancellor." And whether that's true or not--and I said, "Well, it wasn't me that beat the chancellor. It was the community, it was the students, it was everybody else who beat the chancellor, because that's what it all came down to.

So that's how the tenure case came to an end. That's how my being the director of the Asian American Studies Center starts, and I remain director for twenty years. The center becomes the largest, most prominent center, probably the most prominent ethnic studies center in the whole country and probably the world. It was amazing to have fought, in a sense, the central administration for three years at least, and then when I do become the director, for them to support me.

In 1992 our center became the national focal point for organizing activities in relation to the fiftieth anniversary of Japanese Americans being incarcerated during World War II, of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. And the year before, I put together a proposal for a year-long series of exhibits, conferences, events, in-service trainings and so forth, and I went to Andrea Rich, who by that time had become the executive vice chancellor. Also at that time, the chancellor had this thing called a Challenge Grant in the Arts. It was a hundred-thousand-dollar kind of fund that they would give to like one outstanding initiative per year. I think the year before they had given it to World Arts and Culture, to kind of get their program going, and they gave me or gave the center a hundred thousand dollars for this year-long program.

And even though Andrea has been really criticized by many people, particularly when she was executive vice chancellor, she was great to us, and I also had enormous respect for her kind of knowledge of how things got done at UCLA. I think she also knew that just giving us a hundred thousand dollars wouldn't necessarily lead to cooperation by many units on this campus. I mean, what we had proposed was like working with the university library, with the

Wight Art Gallery, with the law school, with the Center for Performing Arts, with the Office of Instructional Development, so forth. This was like a campus-wide thing going on for a whole year. I still remember going to the Wight Art Gallery and telling them that we'd love to put on this exhibit of art, paintings that were done during World War II inside the camps, and that UCLA's Special Collections had many of these paintings that were never, ever displayed. We told them when we would love to have the show and so forth, and they look at their calendar and say, "Well, we really can't do it. We program things three years ahead and so forth, so I'm sorry, we just can't cooperate with you." And this was the first time the Asian American Studies Center had ever tried to do anything with Wight Art Gallery. So Andrea Rich assigned a staff person, not necessarily full-time, but somebody who was designated from the chancellor's office to help us open doors and to tell people that the chancellor was behind this whole initiative. So I told the person, "We tried to do this at the Wight, and they just really weren't interested. They said they're all booked and so forth." So she gives them a call. Then I get a call a little later on, and they said, "Oh, well, during that little period right around your fiftieth anniversary when you want to start this whole thing, in February of 1992, we suddenly do have this three-week period where we don't have anything. And then in the fall, if you'd like, we have three months we could do something." Okay? So we take both slots. The first one is a comparative art exhibit, and it displays Ansel Adams' photographs of Manzanar, these beautiful shots of the Sierras and all that stuff, that are in her Special Collections, never been displayed, right. And in contrast, we unearth this art exhibit that was first produced in 1972, and it was done by a photojournalist who really captured the despair and everything else of the Japanese Americans having to go into the camps, so a completely different image of what happened. We got this exhibit out of mothballs and so forth. So it becomes this comparative art show, photo show in their gallery, and it gets national attention, right, because they're images, right. Fiftieth anniversary, but there are these images of the camps. And it attracts in three weeks, I mean, something like twenty-five thousand people. They've never seen anything like it, okay.

And then in the fall, we do something more ambitious, and that is to display all these wonderful paintings and so forth that Japanese Americans did during the camps. It's for three months. It draws this huge crowd. It's featured in a lot of magazines and things, and it's one of the very, very first things that the Japanese American National Museum does, and we cooperate also with community groups. So they don't have really at that stage much of a venue in Little Tokyo. But suddenly they're in Wight, right, beautiful courtyard, the [Franklin D. Murphy] Sculpture Garden. I mean, all that, right? And so it's great for them, it's great for us, it's great for the Wight Art Gallery.

So a lot of things were like that, and it was just a very, very different experience for this twenty-year period, when for the most part we had just tremendous sort of support from the chancellor, and this current chancellor is probably the most supportive, Gene Block. I don't think any of the previous chancellors, nor any chancellor or president in any other university in the country, would have declared this year as the Year of Ethnic Studies, which is what he's done. So a little bit more genuine sort of acknowledgement of ethnic studies and of diversity on this campus.

Cline

Well, we'll talk next time about those last couple of decades. [Nakanishi laughs] I don't know if we'll finish, but we'll give it the old college try, and we'll take it from there. But I want to say thank you, and also I will never look at the Anderson School the same way again. [laughter]

1.8. Session 8 (April 8, 2010)

Cline

It's our eighth session. This is Alex Cline interviewing Don Nakanishi. Today is April 8, 2010. We're in the college library, Powell Library, again on the UCLA campus in one of the conference rooms, sitting down to what we think and perhaps hope will be our last session. Good morning.

Nakanishi

Good morning.

Cline

We spent the last session discussing your famous or perhaps even notorious three-year tenure battle, something that had to be very

challenging if not somewhat excruciating for you and others involved, but which stands as a very important landmark sort of a case and something that I think stands as a really important thing to have happen, as difficult as it was. I had a couple of follow-up questions about it.

Based on what a lot of more mainstream conservative academia seem to have in the way of ideas or opinions about the discipline of ethnic studies, how much, if any, expectation did you have going into your application for tenure that things might get at least somewhat, if not maybe considerably, challenging?

Nakanishi

Well, I think generally for all assistant prof[essor]s going up for tenure, even here at UCLA, where departments traditionally have been fairly careful about hiring people that showed the promise of getting tenure, and unlike the Harvards and the Yales at that time, that didn't give tenure to any assistant prof[essor]--and so there at least was the thought that, one, it's not automatic, but, second, that it was still possible, that large numbers of people did get tenure.

I was not the first Asian American professor to have difficulties. In fact, our first permanent director, who held the position of director for fifteen years or more, Lucie Cheng, also faced some difficulties when she went up for tenure. She was a sociologist and did work both in relation to sort of Chinese American communities here in Los Angeles and in the U.S., as well as sort of trans-national kinds of processes, involving Chinese migrants and their communities which they came from in China and so forth, and was both heavily empirically oriented, so collected data and all that other stuff, but also was very serious about trying to advance theory. Perhaps it was some of the theories that she kind of preferred, which tended to be somewhat more class-based, could be interpreted as Marxist, not necessarily Marxist but enough to scare some people, but she had difficulties. Her difficulties, I think, came sort of after her departmental review invoked, whereas in my case, it all starts from the beginning, and so that becomes really unusual.

But in 1986 through '89, eighteen to twenty years after the founding of ethnic studies here on this campus, and really in all of American higher education at that time, there's still large, large segments of this faculty here at UCLA, one, that did not understand,

nor did they care to understand, nor were they terribly sympathetic about issues of diversity and ethnic studies. Even something that we now take somewhat for granted here on this campus for undergraduate education, and we see some value in it in terms of a student's education, I mean, that's, namely, service learning, was something that ethnic studies classes had done from the very, very start, of encouraging their students to go out and work in local communities, to do research, to do projects that would benefit these communities or students at high schools that they left or whatever. But at that time, I mean, doing that kind of project of having that kind of requirement, particularly here at UCLA, was not viewed very favorably.

I don't know, I just found it kind of interesting, because particularly at Yale, experiential learning was viewed as kind of an important thing to do, I mean, and you could do it in all kinds of different ways, but that there are limits to what you could really learn in the classroom through a lecture, or how much you could learn through what was already written in books and journals or whatever, and the only way in which you sort of acquire new knowledge or your own self-awareness is by kind of going out there by yourself and experiencing it.

But I think there are times when I sort of felt that many faculty members here viewed UCLA as kind of a public Ivy League university that just happened to be in Los Angeles. At that time professors, particularly the ones who had been here for twenty or thirty years, were able, when they were assistant profs or young associate profs, to have bought a house very close to campus. So they didn't have to go out and live in the valley or live in places that were sort of not upper-middle class, white and so forth, and they had to kind of deal a little bit more with the diversity of this region. So, yes, I mean, I was fairly certain it was going to be a challenge. But still, I was somewhat optimistic, and particularly after going back to talking about my particular case, when I did meet with the three people who were on my departmental ad-hoc committee, three full professors, two of whom had been here many years, over fifteen years at that time, and one who was very senior who had just come from Yale a few years ago, and who at the end of my sort of required conversation with them said, "Well, everything looks good. Don't worry about anything, and," whatever, "be surprised

when you hear the news in the spring." So I just assumed things were going to go all right.

Cline

Okay. And considering the ending to the whole saga, which you revealed last time and which has a certain disappointingly dark edge to it in a way, you didn't say if there had been any sort of agreement along these lines, but if so you can explain that, but what made you decide to wait so long to divulge the ending to the story?

Nakanishi

Oh. I was not required by any means, by the university, by the chancellor, my lawyer, anybody, not to reveal sort of what happened. But I don't know, I simply didn't when it happened, during that week or whatever. I don't know. I can't really recall, but maybe it had something to do with the fact that I was going to apply to be the director, and there's no reason for me to talk about that particular episode up in San Francisco, if, in fact, I was searching, and I think I really was searching, to see whether or not I could work with the central administration and also whether they could work with me. I just think that when I received fairly clear signals pretty early on after I became director, that this was going to be just the reverse of what I had gone through for three years, that, namely, they were going to support me, and for me to have, in a sense, all of the support and legitimacy of the central administration in terms of what we were trying to do, well, I didn't think it was necessary to kind of share that episode, so I didn't. And yet, in particularly the last nine months, as I was anticipating retiring in November, whatever, you look back at things and you also look forward, and I recall going to somebody's kind of retirement event, somebody who had retired from the President's Office of the University of California up in Oakland, and who made some statement about how you shouldn't go into retirement with secrets, let alone going into your grave with secrets, right, and so that got me thinking, and this was something that I thought I should share. I think it reveals-- and hopefully, it's not so much that it reveals something about Chuck [Charles E.] Young, but it kind of reveals something about people in very, very high positions of leadership on campuses like UCLA and how both politics and everything else and social conditions affect them, but also how they

can be very, very human too. I think if you're an assistant prof, you never, hardly interact with someone like that, unless you-- and even when you do interact, maybe it's at a reception or something, it's never going to get very deep or revealing. So I thought in that sense it was important to know.

And then I think second is the fact that I think it made a real big difference to both Asian American Studies and ethnic studies, not only on this campus but really nationwide, that I was able to get tenure, I was able to become director, and I was able to get just unprecedented resources and support to build this program. So it sort of serves like as kind of a model that all these other programs can kind of emulate, that they can-- I was called many, many times during the past twenty years, to go to campuses and to meet with chancellors and vice chancellors and provosts and so forth, by the students, by the faculty, who are interested in Asian American Studies and who wanted me to just talk with their leadership and to kind of tell them what we were able to do at UCLA, to dispel some myths, like is there a real large pool of applicants out there that are qualified to be professors. And I could talk about ten different searches and how many people that we were able to attract to apply, and then what we ended up with, and how these people got tenure, and I mean all these kinds of things.

So the kind of UCLA model has been spread all over the country. There's no campus that has as many Asian American Studies specialists, faculty specialists, like we do, nor does anyone have a center like we do. But it still serves as this kind of model that everybody else can kind of point to. They may end up with eight faculty members total on campus, but still, that's eight more than they ever had before.

Cline

You kind of answered my next question, which is, how did this rather public drama ultimately affect the development of the Asian American Studies Center when you became director? How much do you think the attention that you got from all that did ultimately help the Center? I mean, you've sort of described a bit already. You had mentioned before that you were able to get an unprecedented number of faculty in negotiating for your directorship, so maybe a twofold thing. How did your more public sort of struggle ultimately help the Center, and perhaps because of it, what sort of--other than

the faculty numbers--what sort of changes were you able to see happen in the Center once you became director?

Nakanishi

Well, clearly, under Lucie Cheng's leadership and the leadership of many other directors of ethnic studies programs--they had developed, despite lots of opposition over time and lack of resources, they sort of had developed kind of an agenda of what these centers ought to be doing. So they had developed programs in teaching, right. So it first started off with a couple of classes. Then they started thinking about degree programs. So fairly early on, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, and American Indian Studies put together proposals for master's programs.

I helped to write the one when I was a member of the staff--in 1974 I think it was, that we finished ours, and we were a little behind African American Studies in terms of this kind of process for approval. And theirs got hung up politically, because, well, because of Angela [Y.] Davis, okay? I mean, her case was over and everything, as I recall, but still, there was all this stuff in relation to African American Studies in which the Regents [of the University of California] wanted to take a little closer look at it before approving the nation's first graduate program in African American Studies. So ours was probably six months behind the process, but we came right to the same spot and leapfrogged over them, and so Asian American Studies actually developed the very first graduate program in Asian American Studies here at UCLA and here in the whole country, at that time. Same with the undergraduate program; it eventually becomes a degree program. And then ultimately all of this, for us and for Chicano Studies, in early 2000 become departments, right?

Another thing was--and so all of that happened during the last twenty years of a master's program that had started in 1974, keeps going, keeps attracting students who then go on to Ph.D. work, go become writers or whatever, and we then also develop the master's program and so forth, and then we're bringing in more faculty, and that ultimately turns into a department, right, in 2004 or '05. So that happens kind of when I'm director, right.

The second was--and I mentioned this a few minutes ago, this idea of doing work in the community, of encouraging students to go out

and work in communities, but also our professors to do community-based research and so forth, and more generally, for the centers to serve as kind of liaisons, points of contact between UCLA and these--both the old communities, but so many new communities that are forming during this past forty years, and in particular, during the last twenty years. So maybe also as a result of how my particular tenure case was fought, namely, that there was so much support, so much participation by all of the different Asian American communities, so many different groups, so many different leaders, and it was both local and national, that suddenly here's the Center, and it's in the context of the whole kind of organized Asian American community.

So that provided just a wonderful opportunity when I took over, for us to just do a lot of things in coordination with these community organizations. And one of those projects involved the very first kind of Internet network, and it involved our Center and six of the largest and leading Asian American social-service agencies here in Los Angeles. We tried to--and we did get money, both from the Federal Telecommunications Agency as well as, at that time, Pacific Bell, which has since become AT&T, to build kind of a network and to put in T-1 lines. I mean, we're talking T-3 right now, but who knows, maybe in the future you'll be talking about T-10s or whatever. But T-1s were like big deals. We were talking about being able to do like conference calls, I mean, for all the different agencies, so that they wouldn't have to physically meet, that we would have in-service classes that a UCLA professor could teach, and staff members of these agencies could, like, get a lesson on the demographic changes of the community or whatever.

And so there was both the collaboration organizationally, but also, it kind of put the Center in that position to sort of be at the forefront of Internet stuff as it related to Asian Americans. So the Center actually published the very first booklet on something called the "Asian American Internet Guide," and it lists like, whatever, thirty different websites, I mean, which were like, wow, websites, right? [laughs] And how do you get to websites? So there are instructions on how one got to the World Wide Web and stuff like that. So for the last twenty years, we have exploited the Internet, and that also has just made the kind of visibility of the Center and all of its faculty. Whenever there's an achievement by the faculty, whether

they get promoted, they write a book, they get an award or whatever, we shoot that information out. Whenever a new issue of a journal, "Amerasia Journal" or "Nexus Journal" comes out, we shoot that out.

So we have a very, very big presence in the World Wide [Web] net, and again, that kind of starts with kind of our initial collaboration, from our founding, of working with outside of this university and with community groups, and then it gets further enhanced during my tenure thing, and then we kind of exploit that even more. So we continue to encourage our students to go out there and to learn from working in these communities. Our faculty, particularly those that do any kind of field work, whether they are the social-science types or the ones who are in professional schools, are out there in communities and so forth.

And then I think the thing that we did in 1992, and we started planning for it in 1991, and I think I mentioned this, where our Center kind of served as the kind of national headquarters for the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese American internment. That's when, with the help of the chancellor's office, we were able to establish relationships with units on this campus that we had really not been able to develop over the years, and who knows why, but we hadn't. But we had never done anything with the Center for Performing Arts. We had worked with the Department of Special Collections because of particularly the Japanese American Research Collection, but other than archives, we had never done things like exhibits and things, and that was a way in which they could showcase their great stuff. We had never worked with the Wight Art Gallery. We had never worked with the Theater Department. We had done a faculty search with the law school, but we had never done a civil rights conference with the law school.

And I forget whether we had ever really worked with the Office of Instructional Development, but we put in a proposal to do a quarter-long in-service training in which one of our professors, Valerie Matsumoto, taught like fifteen other UCLA professors about the internment during World War II, with the idea that they would incorporate that into their classes. So that event--and for all of them, they required not only our working with a campus unit, but also for both of us to be working with a relevant community group, right? And so whether it was the Japanese American National

Museum, whether it was the East West Players--we brought Hiroshima on campus, I mean, all these things, so that's what I think that whole year-long thing just, again, kind of just spread us all over the place, and we realized that we had to deal with some misconceptions out there, but at the same time, we knew that there was also a lot of support on campus.

So for the next twenty years, I mean, even though it was one of the kind of founding kind of ideas for why the Asian American Studies Center started, I mean, it talks about how we should have this impact on the entire campus--I think for the first eighteen to twenty years, the rest of the campus or lots of it just didn't seem like they were all that interested in our having much of an impact. But I think during the last twenty, we have really been committed to doing that, and we have found a lot of willing partners.

And then this year, with this particular chancellor, I mean, I can't think of another university that would declare a whole year to celebrate ethnic studies, like Gene Block has. So it says something about Gene Block, and Scott [L.] Waugh, who is the executive vice chancellor and so forth, to have done something like that and to put some resources in it, and then for all of us to work with the Fowler [Museum], I mean the wonderful exhibit that they have up right now. And Fowler wasn't always the most willing partner for us, and so it's great.

Cline

You suggested something in this area a little while ago, but one of the questions I wanted to ask you was, here in this part of the world, in southern California, where there are many of the largest of some specific Asian communities outside those countries in Asia, how much do you think the location and the proximity of those communities has affected the Asian American Studies Center here, particularly in relation to others like it elsewhere in the country?

Nakanishi

Well, it would look like to have made the Asian American Studies Center here and the department so large and so prominent and so forth was an intentional, strategic decision by the chancellor's office, and I wish that were the case. But still, it is not like they resisted. And I think that particularly this chancellor, I think, understands it, because he himself has spent a couple of years in Japan as a postdoc scholar. He still does many research projects with Japanese

and other Asian scientists, and even though he spent his entire career at University of Virginia before coming here, I think he can understand, I mean, how UCLA is in a position, just like all the other universities here are sort of in a position to capitalize on that. And yet, UCLA is the only one that kind of has built up its Asian American Studies program. That is not true with [University of California] Berkeley, and it's really not true with Stanford [University] or really with 'SC [University of Southern California]. So in that sense, it's unfortunate. I mean, some of the others do pay a lot more attention to Asia period, but not so much to what's happening in their local communities. And one could argue the same thing in relation to the Latino communities or Latino domestic communities and the extent to which these institutions here are doing all that they can to support their efforts, to leverage, in a sense, their strategic location, to do something more in relation to this nation and so forth.

So there's still a little bit of that kind of lingering Ivy League kind of orientation, and in part, that comes from particularly the major universities being so-called Research 1 institutions, and when they think about their peer institutions, there are obviously some here in California, the UCLA, the Stanford, Berkeley, 'SC, [University of California] San Diego, [University of California] Santa Barbara and so forth, and yet there are hundreds across the country and particularly in the Northeast that they're comparing themselves to.

Cline

Right. Given the fact that the primary mission here is always said to be research, there's a very large student body here, and the student body does reflect to some degree the area, and to some degree the nation. There's been certainly one really large change that has affected the student body in terms of diversity, and that was a vote put to the citizens of the State of California a few years back. Particularly within your Center and also as you see it campus-wide, what kind of changes have you seen in the student body here during the time you were director of the Center, and what impact did that have on the Center and its activities, if any?

Nakanishi

Well, until Proposition 209 was approved by the voters of California a little over ten years ago, this was a remarkably diverse campus, and I mean diverse in the sense that particularly with the number of

so-called underrepresented groups, of African Americans, American Indians, Chicanos, Latinos, that there were sizable numbers of them. And yet, with the passage of 209, I mean, that also I think further accelerated a process that was happening even before that passage, and that was, namely, the growing number of Asian Americans who were both applying to this campus and who were being admitted.

For a long time, I mean, there was the controversy in the early 1980s about potential quotas against Asian Americans, and at that time the kind of frightening sort of level that they had kind of reached was like 20 percent at both Berkeley and UCLA and 10 percent at Ivy League schools and Stanford. That was like, gee, unheard of, because before that they were at least half of that amount, if not far less. But that was what the big controversy was about, and particularly for institutions that were able to socially engineer their freshman class, I mean, there really were these allegations that when you did compare average SAT scores and things like that, grades for applicants, by race or ethnicity, that it sure looked like Asian Americans had a harder time getting in than particularly white applicants.

But nonetheless, Proposition 209 gets passed, and that's coming at a time when, still, the number of Asian Americans who were applying to UCLA and Stanford and Berkeley and every place else, is accelerating, and suddenly they have more spaces that they can compete for. UCLA from then on, I mean, begins to be well over 40 percent Asian American, and just about every other UC campus, with the exception, I think, of Santa Barbara, [University of California] Santa Cruz, and [University of California] Riverside--or maybe Riverside is--[University of California] of Merced, are well into the 40-50 percent range for Asian American undergraduates. And even though one could see that in terms of the applicant pool and everything else, that Asians are just about there, I mean, in terms of the applicant pool, and even when you look at eligibility studies that the percentage of Asian American high school graduates who were eligible for both the UCs and the Cal States is several times higher than that for whites, and maybe ten times higher than that for African Americans or Latinos, that these campuses, even though one could say they're diverse, because 70

percent of the students are students of color, but Asian Americans just represent such a large proportion of that.

But the other important thing, I guess, to keep in mind about UCLA, which makes it different from all the other campuses that experienced this growth of Asian Americans, is the fact that UCLA has had very, very active and very progressive Asian American student organizations, ever since the start. There are now, I don't know, eighty or ninety of them on campus, and there is one umbrella group called the Asian Pacific Coalition, and that represents about twenty-five to thirty of the groups. They've always had an office at the Asian American Studies Center. It's sort of a recognition of the role that they played at the Center in founding it, and also just I think some real benefits that come from a research center that's not only outreaching to the community and nationwide, but also is trying to reach and to have an impact on campus, and one of the most important ways you do that is through students, and not just by teaching them.

So the student organizations have been very, very active. So it's more than just kind of pointing to--if the Asian American Studies Center or the department is trying to seek resources, they don't simply say, "Well, look at all those students." I mean, at times the students themselves are organized enough that they can also go and advocate for what they would like and so forth, so I think they are clearly as much responsible for the growth of the Center as anybody.

Cline

With this diversity of all these different Asian Americans, in terms of nationality and background, and this is somewhat of a silly question but something I want to ask anyway, under the unifying umbrella of Asian American Studies, how do these diverse groups get along, in your view?

Nakanishi

Well, I think that both on campus among student groups, as well as out in the real world in terms of their communities and organizations and so forth, that you find both tendencies. You find many examples where Asian American groups of all different ethnic communities have come together on issues, where they also perceive, in a sense, the most compelling issues as being shared ones. So whether we're talking about the persistence of glass

ceilings for employment, whether we're talking about prejudice of some sort, racial prejudice, sort of invisibility in mass media and in many ways popular culture, something like the Asian admissions issue, racial violence, I mean all these kinds of things, they are issues in which Asian Americans of all the different diverse kinds of groups, of ideologies, of religions, of social classes and so forth, men and women, I mean, all can kind of come together to work on them.

And yet at the same time, you have these very, very vibrant communities, very, very vibrant business areas and commercial areas that tend to be almost exclusively of one ethnic community, whether you're talking Chinatown or Little Saigon or Little India or whatever, as well as the organizations that kind of are created ethnic-specifically-- Organization of Chinese Americans, Japanese American Citizens League, Korean American Coalition, whatever-- who have experience great success in terms of attracting people to their organizations, of educating them on certain issues through that means, of being able to communicate oftentimes in those languages, and having, in a sense, maybe an even stronger sense of a shared community that leads to greater fundraising for politics, for campaigns, as well to build things like museums and for dinners or whatever.

But I think ever since this Asian American idea was sort of hatched in the late 1960s, and a lot of credit is given to the late Professor Yuji Ichioka for having coined the term, and the kind of philosophy that surrounds it, that has sort of been there along with the more ethnic-specific stuff. I've never seen this either-or thing, and there are so many examples where both things are operating, both things are successful.

There are also just a lot of very common life experiences that Asian Americans are going through in large numbers, and one of them happens to be higher education, where Asian Americans from all the different groups suddenly come to an academic community and spend four or more years, right, living together and going to classes together and dating and marrying and whatever. So I think that idea will still exist and still be fairly strong. But I can understand why when the U.S. Census tests how effective it would be to put on the census survey questionnaire "Asian American" as something that you check, that most groups would really like it to be more

disaggregated and to be able to get that more disaggregated data and so forth, not only for number-counting purposes, but also and maybe more critically, in terms of like health reasons, and there are very wide disparities in terms of cancer rates, cancer screening, health insurance and so forth, and they vary in terms of those ethnic communities.

Cline

Right. We're living in "interesting times," in quotes. We have an African American president right now, and we have a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment in this country right now. Here we are in an institution of higher education, with this large number of Asian students moving into what are probably important sorts of jobs--we hope they're available. Just from your experience and based on your knowledge and point of view, where do you see something like Asian American Studies going in terms of its significance when, say, students leave the university, and particularly in a climate where there may be things like glass ceilings in more places than maybe there were before, depending on which direction things go in this country, and particularly as it involves some very specific ethnic communities, immigrant communities, bearing in mind that I think many people nowadays have no idea that before 1965 there were anti-Asian immigration laws in this country--where do you think things might be headed for people coming out of your program?

Nakanishi

Well, I think things have gotten better in the past forty years. I don't know if I mentioned this in a previous interview, but when I was a freshman at Yale, I still recall meeting four or five of my classmates who were dead serious about becoming president of the United States, and that was something that I just thought was kind of amazing, that, one, they would have those ambitions. But I knew that, or at least I thought at that time, that that was something that I could not obtain no matter what I did.

And yet, I look at one of my friends who was just a class below me at Yale, and his name is Gary Locke, and he's from Seattle--he went to Yale and then law school in Boston, and then goes back to Seattle, which has had a long old Chinese and Japanese and Filipino and Korean--I guess those are the four groups, but Pacific Islanders too--community, and they were organized, politically and everything else. But essentially, you're talking about a very, very white city,

Seattle, and a white state. And yet, he was elected governor twice. Pretty remarkable. I mean, I've always wondered why people never mention him as a potential presidential candidate or whatever, because every time there isn't an incumbent, I mean, people are kind of looking around, and actually, the two presidents of my sort of cohort and probably generation were both former governors, I mean, namely, Bill [William J.] Clinton and George [W.] Bush. So why wasn't Gary Locke mentioned? But Gary Locke right now is the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, so he's probably on that chain of succession somewhere, number eight or nine, I don't know. But I think things, I mean, have changed, and I hope that they change even more in the future. But they are by no means color blind and prejudice-free and so forth. I also think that Asian American Studies, whether it's through the classes that students take while they are students, and it's not only just Asian American Studies classes, but it could be a class in race relations or urban politics or whatever, in which they read a book that either deals with Asian American kinds of issues or Asian American history, or even U.S. history. Let's take that. I mean, kind of a class that everybody now takes. I think that there are probably more and more professors who teach that, who recognize that there was some interesting stuff that was going on within the U.S. at the time of World War II. And for a long time, until women's studies came around, I mean, people didn't even talk about the role that women played in World War II, let alone what African Americans were doing, I mean, their great migration from the South to the North and their work in all the war industries, let alone what happened to a hundred and twenty thousand Japanese Americans. I also think that Asian American Studies has trained more experts, I mean, who are researchers and so forth, and some are professors at colleges and so forth. But others work at research centers, and others have obviously just written things that are accessible. Many of these issues have persisted and so maybe there's a study based on the 2000 census that kind of serves as a framework of kinds of questions that you ask, where you go and look for certain kinds of data that may be relevant to this person in 2010 or 2020, who's suddenly confronted with some kind of issue that they may need to deal with, whether it's to document systematic discrimination within a Fortune 500 company or something like that, or the lack of Asian

Americans who become partners in major law firms or something like that, but maybe there's a study from the 1990 or even the 2000 census that was written by somebody in Asian American Studies that kind of showed them how one goes about collecting that kind of data.

Also, unlike where I learned, in a sense, about race, namely from African American writers and leaders, the Ralph Ellisons and the [James] Baldwins and so forth, and then "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," the speeches of Martin Luther King [Jr.] and others, there are Asian Americans now, I mean, who have written some very, very insightful, very, very powerful--whether it's nonfiction, whether it is prose, whether it's a collection of speeches that they delivered or whatever, and just like I could identify with an African American and somehow figure out how those insights that person was sharing were kind of similar to what I was feeling or seeing, well, hopefully somebody who is Cambodian or Hmong, and there isn't a whole lot of literature right now that deals with their experience, but maybe they're going to read something by a Chinese American or a Korean American that could be helpful to them, along with African Americans and American Jews and others who give them kind of some sense of the status of their groups, of the opportunities and challenges facing individuals in this society. Then I think the other thing that was there even when I was growing up, and people talk about it being an even greater sort of trend and process, but that's globalization, right, and how these sort of domestic kinds of issues or national boundaries or whatever, really are being transcended by these larger sort of forces and relationships. I don't know, I mean, it is clearly there, but I guess my point would be that it was also there when I was growing up too, so whether it is really more than before, I don't know. It may simply be that we are looking for it a whole lot more than before.

Cline

Right. Maybe.

Nakanishi

We also have ways in which to see it much more quickly, right, through the Internet and stuff like that, but we did have television, and we could see this guy on the Moon walking around, so at least at that time we had some forms of communication, like telephones and--

Cline

Right, mail. [laughter] Right. So you've kind of answered it, but how do you view the ongoing relevance of not just Asian American Studies, but the term Asian American as you discussed it a little while ago? Some people still seem to have feelings about that, either pro or con. Do you see that changing, or not?

Nakanishi

No. I still think that at least two of the main sort of I guess ingredients, I guess, of that perspective, I mean, one, that the society kind of looks at all Asian Americans, regardless of ethnicity and social class and so forth, in a somewhat similar manner, and views us monolithically. It's still true. I think, clearly, one could talk about our past as having a very shared past, and where the endpoint of past is--is it yesterday, is it fifty years ago or whatever--may be something to consider, but I think those two things are still there, that could still rally people to organize along those lines. So even though some people object and say, well, this is a government-imposed kind of term to kind of categorize all these diverse groups under one umbrella, what people fail to recognize is that this is a term that Asian Americans themselves put forward as a form of self-determination. So I think that will still be relevant. And maybe it's good that there is still some questioning of it, that the term will go through some transformation or whatever. It's just like the organization we founded at Yale in 1969, and we called it the Asian American Student Association. That was a new term. It was embraced, at least by the fifty-nine Asian American students who were there at the time. And yet, as time went on and there was a growth of Asian American students, and there was a growth of student organizations, that organization actually became smaller and smaller, and some of these other ethnic-specific groups got larger, and yet the administration always recognized the Asian American Student Association as being the Asian American organization. And so some of these smaller other groups, I mean, kind of were resentful of that fact.

And somewhere during the last forty years, because it's existed until now, they had to really, whatever, struggle about what this all meant, and so they actually changed the name to the Asian American Student Alliance, right, which kind of reflects, well, there

are all these other groups too, and this is more like an umbrella organization.

Cline

Right. And you get to keep the same acronym.

Nakanishi

Yes, right. But it kind of shows, I mean, how they were sort of dealing with--I mean, all the groups could kind of agree that Asian American was the thing to call themselves. They could have called themselves Asian if they wanted, I guess, or Pacific or--

Cline

Something. Right. What about for you personally, your sense of your identity and how you think of yourself in light of all that has been experienced, accomplished, and discussed in this context of Asian American Studies, academia, life?

Nakanishi

I don't know. I would identify myself, I mean, in all kinds of ways. I mean, clearly, like I would say I'm Asian American, I'm Japanese American, I'm third generation and so forth. I still have a very strong affinity towards--having grown up in a very multi-ethnic, but predominantly Mexican American community, and having many friends, many best friends be Mexican American over the years. So I don't know, I mean, having many identities. So if I'm really called on to express one of them, I will. But I mean, I think everybody is complicated in that sense and probably doesn't really like to be pigeonholed into one little title, whatever.

Cline

Right. But you did succeed in walking into where I wanted to go, which is to come back to your diverse experience growing up in the place that you grew up. We'd talked a lot about the changes that have happened in that area, and you're still living out in that area now. What, if anything, are you doing that you can mention on behalf of that area? You mentioned that you were involved in an effort to incorporate East L.A. as a city quite a while ago. What's happening out in your part of the world now, and are you involved?

Nakanishi

Well, I mean, this is early April 2010, and even though I formally retired as a faculty member November first, 2009, I've been recalled and have stayed on as director sort of half-time until now, so I haven't quite experienced full retirement. And yet, I had some

things that I still wanted to finish and I still haven't finished, in terms of writing and research.

But one of the things that--and I've forgot what detail I talked about this before, but I am very interested in working on and assisting this current effort that's been going on for a couple of years now to again seek cityhood for unincorporated East L.A. This group is composed of younger people, I mean, and they are far more politically sophisticated than we were when we did it in 1974. They did collect some sixteen thousand signatures from registered voters in the area, and right now they are in the process of trying to collect this required hundred and forty thousand dollars for an agency to do kind of a formal feasibility study of whether or not a city could survive, I mean, with the revenue that it could generate and the costs of different kinds of services. There was a preliminary feasibility study done about a year and a half ago, and it did show that it could make it. If this agency does the study and determines that a city could survive, then there will be a vote and probably sometime in 2010, 2011, and I'm hopeful that it'll become a city. I just think that the area will really advance, economically and in so many other ways, when there is local control and it's really the people of that area who decide on its future.

Currently, there's one staff member for the supervisor who is in charge of that area, who's kind of responsible for many other unincorporated areas within the supervisor's jurisdiction and who probably has many other responsibilities too, and so it really hasn't gotten, I think, the attention that it could.

Cline

I see.

Nakanishi

And then I am also working for this organization that my best friend from high school, Castello de la Rocha, that he took over in I guess around 1974, '75, after he had graduated from Boalt [Hall] Law School. He became the head of the East L.A. Free Clinic, and at that time it had a budget of thirty-five thousand dollars a year, and he has developed it into a two hundred million dollar health organization. So to help him--I mean, it doesn't look like he needs a whole lot of help, but maybe I'm going to learn a whole lot from him too. But it'd be fun to do things with him.

I'm also going to be doing things with Dr. Carlos Haro, who went to Roosevelt High [School] also. He's a couple of years older than me and came here as an undergraduate at UCLA, got his Ph.D., is one of the founders of the Chicano Studies Center here, and served for a while as the assistant director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, and then for many years served as the assistant director of what's now called the International Institute here, for all the area studies, and then kind of returned till he retired as the assistant director of Chicano Studies again--to do things out there in the community.

I still serve on a number of national boards and things, and I'm still planning to write a book on my research that I've done in Australia in relation to Asian political participation there and to continue to write about politics and education and so forth here.

For many years, since I did a postdoc in Japan for a year after I got my doctorate--when I was there, a friend of mine said, "Well, it'd be good while you're here to collect something, because it'll give you something to do when you travel. And Japan is a very regionally kind of oriented place, and many times a local community or a city or whatever will have its own souvenir, its own snack, its own cookie or whatever, so it'll give you something to do." So I took his advice, and I was, whatever, walking around Tokyo, and I saw this gift store, and I saw in the display case what are called maneki nekos. These are, traditionally in Japan they are white cats, or they can be black cats. They have red ears and one of the paws is up. There are different stories in terms of why the paw is up, what the significance of these cats are and so forth. And over time, they've actually moved over into the whole Chinese world, okay?

Cline

Yes, right.

Nakanishi

And so you see them many times now in Chinese establishments--

Cline

And Vietnamese too.

Nakanishi

Yes, and they view them as bringing good luck, bringing good fortune and so forth, and not so much to welcome people. But I've been collecting those ever since, some nearly thirty-five years, and so I've got a collection of about four hundred of those things.

Cline

[laughs] Oh, wow.

Nakanishi

Many of them are just in boxes. I still haven't built these display cases, so hopefully when all of that is done, then I can display them, both via the Internet as well as maybe somebody would want a show, an exhibit on all those cats. So those are some of the things I want to do.

Cline

And you're involved in a lot--you're on boards and things, you mentioned that. You're still very busy. What about your successor here on campus?

Nakanishi

Well, the announcement should come out any day now. He has approved everything and so it's just a question of Claudia Mitchell-Kernan cranking out that announcement and then spreading it around campus, and then we can spread it all over the world and everything. But his name is David Yoo, Y-o-o, and he grew up here in L.A. in the Torrance area. He's Korean American, went to Claremont McKenna [College] undergraduate, then went to Princeton [University] Theological Seminary, and then went to Yale for his Ph.D. in American Studies/history, and that's when I first met him, when he was a grad student and I was a professor by then, and so forth. But I've known him for about twenty years. He actually wrote his dissertation, which turned into his first book, on second-generation Japanese Americans. He spent a few stints, postdoc and other kinds of things, at the Asian American Studies Center, and his first job until now, I mean his only job, was being a professor of history at Claremont McKenna, his alma mater. So he has sort of been onboard since January, kind of in an acting capacity, and like I said, as soon as the announcement is out, then we can spread that word. I think he will do very, very well. He is an experienced administrator. He is former chair of his Department of History, but also the founding chair of the Asian American Studies teaching program among all the Claremont colleges. He's familiar with L.A., familiar with our Center, and his second major book is coming out this week from Stanford [University] Press, and it deals with Korean American churches and sort of their role in the Korean independence movement.

So I think we all have very high expectations and so forth of how David will do, and he'll have lots of support from lots of people. He's got a very experienced staff. Hopefully in the next few months we're not going to hear that the University of California has run out of money and we're slashing everything, except we're going to keep trying to build Pauley Pavilion again. So I'm hopeful that things will - in the long run will get better. I mean, there's no reason why, and we have that infrastructure of so many different economic engines in this state to bring it back, and I think this university will do well. It's still going to be the focal point for a lot of issues, a lot of major issues of diversity, of higher education or whatever, and it'll survive. It'll do well.

Cline

You still have what appears to be a very strong loyalty toward Yale, and not so toward Harvard. And here at UCLA, this is the university in the area in which you grew up, and you taught here for a long time. You were a director of the Center here for a long time, a center that's really the high-water mark for such centers everywhere. But you also went through this experience with your tenure struggle. How, if at all, has that experience kind of, I'll just say, affected or colored your feelings about this institution, now that it's sort of your official capacity here is behind you?

Nakanishi

Well, UCLA was my only employer in life for any length of time, so for thirty-five years, I mean, I could count UCLA as my employer. But it also happened to be the place where I've raised the most money for any institution, so I think if you add up all the different endowments and so forth that our center was able to establish, the six endowed chairs, all that stuff, I mean, it's like ten million dollars that we've raised for UCLA, and then to also have served kind of as an ambassador and so forth for this institution. So I've met some great people, both who work here as well as the many alumni that have helped out and either helped on the tenure case, but more importantly, helped to build the Center and so forth. I've always appreciated the fact that they supported me and supported what I was going to do, even if I wasn't a UCLA Bruin.

Yale, I guess what I've done the most work for in relation to Yale is having served for over thirty years as the chair of the alumni effort in relation to recruiting of students for Yale here in Los Angeles

County. We interview anywhere from 5.5 to 6 percent of all applicants to Yale in the entire world, and that comes out to twelve hundred to fifteen hundred kids that we interview every year. About a hundred get in, and we do various things to sort of help them adjust to going to Yale, because we realize how hard it is, I mean, to go three thousand miles away. Most kids in L.A. are not boarding-school kids. They lived at home and all that, and even though Yale is a national student body, maybe even international student body, it's still located in the northeast, and they do a lot of things that are a little different than here.

I think I do less with Harvard just because it just didn't mean as much to me. I mean, I had some great faculty members that I worked with, as well as a great faculty member at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] in Harold Isaacs. But it just wasn't the same, and I think that's true with a lot of people, that those years from eighteen to twenty-one, twenty-two, whatever, are really the most formative years, and they really kind of determine who you're going to be. I think those friendships are more extensive and they're deeper and so forth.

I guess I also, in terms of issues of race and all that, I had greater hope for what Yale could achieve than for what Harvard has achieved. Harvard still doesn't offer, I mean, doesn't have really an Asian American Studies program, and Chicano Studies doesn't do anything, and it just took a whole different attitude towards race. I mean, they wanted to really do a colorblind kind of thing, and that's where Yale has been very different for the last forty years, and recognizes the kinds of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, class backgrounds that kids come from, and so they do more in that sense.

But I'll tell you, and this is a secret, and maybe it's okay to do this in--someone's going to have to go through all these hours to ever discover this secret.

Cline

Right. And it'll be a while before it's available anyway. [Nakanishi laughs] Maybe the cat will be out of the bag before anyone even hears this, but go ahead.

Nakanishi

Well, obviously, there's a handful of people that know this. But growing up in East Los Angeles, there were far more USC fan than

UCLA fans. In particular, I still remember--when I was in, it was either like sixth grade of elementary school, or maybe seventh grade of junior high school--going with a whole bunch of other people in my flag-football team to the Roosevelt-Garfield game at East L.A. College, the first one I ever went to. I must have been in sixth grade, because I think Mike Garrett is five or six years older. He's a little younger than my brother, who's six years older, so I think it's at least five. This was the game in which Mike Garrett scored six touchdowns against Garfield. And later, when Mike Garrett was the first 'SC football player to get a Heisman Trophy, he returned to Roosevelt with his Heisman Trophy, and that's when I was a junior. We had this great ceremony for him and everything, right.

And over the years, I don't think Roosevelt has ever had a football or a basketball player that played for UCLA, even though we have had many who have played for 'SC. So for many years, even while I was working here, I would be rooting for 'SC football.

Cline

[laughs] Wow. That's a [unclear].

Nakanishi

So I don't do that very much anymore.

Cline

That's a major bombshell. [laughter] Say it isn't so.

Nakanishi

I still remember that football game where Mike Garrett just ran and ran. There was a rumor I'd heard once about Johnny [John] Wooden, which kind of turned me off to UCLA basketball for a while, because I used to like UCLA basketball, because--

Cline

What's not to like?

Nakanishi

Yes, right, and they're winning all those things. But the year after I graduated from Roosevelt was when Roosevelt, Lincoln High School, Garfield High School, Wilson High School, all these schools in East Los Angeles had what was called the East L.A. blowouts, or the Chicano walkouts from these four high schools. That also happened to be the year in which Roosevelt had an amazing basketball team. It actually went all the way to the city finals and then it lost to some team in the southern league, so-called southern league, right,

whether it was Jefferson or Manual Arts or whatever. And Roosevelt had these two great players, both African American, and supposedly John Wooden made a commitment to them. But they participated in the walkout along with other students. I mean, nobody was arrested or anything like that. But I guess Johnny Wooden caught wind of the fact that these students protested along with the Chicano students and everybody, and so he withdrew the scholarships. So they went to other places instead of coming here to UCLA. Now, whether that was true or not, I don't know, but it was enough of a kind of urban tale or whatever, I mean, but a rumor or something within the school, that kind of soured me at least to UCLA basketball for a while. It was probably planted by some 'SC guy, you know? [laughter]

Cline

Yes, really. Tarnish the John Wooden legacy.

Nakanishi

But every year we tend to go to El Tepeyac, Manny's on Evergreen Avenue in Boyle Heights, for breakfast on Saturdays, so we've gone there many times the day of the USC-UCLA football game, and I'd say 95 percent of the people there are 'SC fans, right, and they're wearing 'SC jackets.

Cline

There's a lot of red.

Nakanishi

Except for the owner, Manny, who is wearing a UCLA jacket and proud of it.

Cline

That's funny. Cross-town rivalries. So despite your sojourn in the northeast during your college years, you've been in this area most of your life, and this is an area where frequently--it's not so true anymore with young people, but certainly even in my generation, you didn't meet a lot of people who were actually from here. So you've seen it go through a lot of changes. We talked a little bit about UCLA, but maybe we'll end on this note. You're hoping that East L.A. will be incorporated as an independent city. And as for L.A. in general and its population and its changing demographics, a lot is said about the significance of those demographics, particularly in terms of the population of Spanish-speaking and also of Asian

Americans. Where do you see L.A. headed as you look at it from your particular perspective, a rather unique one, I might add.

Nakanishi

Well, I think in particular when I went back East for undergraduate, for an undergraduate education, and I began to spend some time going down to New York, in comparison, I thought L.A. was a big town. It didn't feel like a big city, per se. And yet, over the course of the next forty years, it just grows and grows and grows. L.A. [Los Angeles] County now has ten million people. I don't know what it was in 1970, but I'm sure it wasn't ten million. It was probably several million.

And it rivals New York or any other city. I mean, it's a different kind of city, right. And in some ways, many of the things that it encounters in its own unique kind of way kind of is in advance of what other places are going to experience with very, very extensive immigration, with well, these occasional racial conflicts. I mean, during my lifetime, we've had two big ones, right, '65 and 1992, and, boy, those were unbelievably frightening sort of periods. And for the city to kind of try to confront them and try to get to the bottom of it and to see whether or not we can live together and so forth.

But, yes, I really have enjoyed having grown up here and living here for all these years. I still think L.A. is on the rise. I don't think it's at all in decline. And surprisingly, I think New York City is also on the rise. In the very early seventies, boy, it was a place that most people didn't want to go to school at or work at or whatever, I mean, just the crime and the dirt, everything. I mean, you just didn't want to be there. And yet, there was another side to it that was always so exciting and that attracted you to it.

But I really think that it's going to be very interesting to see how the kind of next generation of people, I mean, who are kind of not college age but a little beyond college age, people in their thirties and forties, when they're in positions of power and so forth, political, economic, whether or not Hollywood will ever change and become a much more diverse kind of enterprise--but I think there's always been great promise here in California, and I'm still very optimistic of its future.

And then all the interesting ways in which, with kind of advanced communications, advanced transportation and other ways in which

there's going to be even more kind of global contact, and for this area, more relationships with both Asia and Latin America, and whether it transforms this area even more.

Cline

More Asians in public office maybe, do you think?

Nakanishi

Oh, yes, I'm sure that will happen. Yes. That's something that's happened during the course of my just looking at it for thirty-something years. I think when you look at things like law firms, and you look at people in business, I mean, they may not be necessarily cracking the boardrooms of some Fortune 500 companies, but in their own way, they're going to create their own Fortune 500 companies. I read that the richest man here in Los Angeles [Patrick Soon-Shiong] is a Chinese American, who happened to be a researcher here at UCLA and has invented some kind of a drug or something for breast cancer. I hope he donates to our center. [laughter] But even that's changing. I mean, he's the guy who wanted to bail out this hospital in South Central L.A.

Cline

King-Drew Medical Center?

Nakanishi

Yes. Going to donate like a hundred million dollars to them or something. So how much does that all start to change, where, in a sense, our elites are the philanthropists and so forth, and do they, in a sense, impose their interests and their tastes and so forth; I mean, the kind of art that's collected, the kind of music that's played at the [Walt] Disney [Concert] Hall and stuff like that. But I don't know, I have great hope for L.A. and for California, so in that sense I think it's going to be a booster of this area.

But I've seen other areas, like that small little community I went to after my freshman year, Idabel, Oklahoma, and I can't say that it's going to have that promising of a future and whether it will even exist in twenty years.

Cline

Right, right. Is there anything you want to say, to add to the record before we finish this process?

Nakanishi

No, just thank you for enduring all these hours of these interviews. Yes, thank you for having captured it all.

Cline

Well, I hope it also helps people who are interested in this subject and adds to your legacy and the legacy of the Asian American Studies Center and all studies in that area nationwide, worldwide. On behalf of the Center for Oral History Research, thank you very much for taking the time to do all that talking into a microphone. We appreciate it.

Nakanishi

It'll be interesting to see whether they still have these probably recording things in the future.

Cline

Yes.

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