MR. HARRY ECHIYU HIRAOKA

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is August 14, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged and honored to interview Mr. Harry Hiraoka at the Fresno County Library at 2420 Mariposa Street, Fresno. Mr. Hiraoka, what is your address?

MR. HIRAOKA: 6232 South Leonard, Fowler, California, 93625.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Before we get into the interview proper, I would like to have you give us your full name, place and date of birth, and place of longest residence.

MR. HIRAOKA: My name is Harry Echiyu Hiraoka. I was born in Fowler on May 26, 1912, and the place of the longest residence now--of course we've never moved over a mile radius from the place where I was born.

I now live about three-quarters of a mile north--due north--of the place where I was born. And this, to me, is the longest place of residence.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Have you been outside this area?

MR. HIRAOKA: During evacuation, yes. That's about the only time I was outside.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Can you tell us a little bit about where and when your parents came to America from Japan?

MR. HIRAOKA: My father came first to Hawaii. I believe he came there in 1902. And then he didn't like the type of work because of prejudice, so forth, he came on to San Francisco and went through immigration. Then from there to San Leandro and I believe he lived there one year. He picked cherries, apricots, and worked in vegetables; but he didn't like the fog. So, after a year, it was 1903 when he came to San Leandro, and in 1904, he arrived in Fowler. And that's where we've been the rest of our lives.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you tell me what Ken he came from?

MR. HIRAOKA: He came from Fukuoka-Ken and mother came from Fukuoka-Ken. Of course, in those days, the custom was photo marriage--picture bride. His first wife could not come to the U.S. because she had trachoma of the eyes, and this was a no-no as far as immigration was concerned. My mother also came from Fukuoka, and she came to San Francisco in 1911.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your dad was here quite a few years before she came then?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, he had established himself, because in those days they had no housing. You recall, Yoshino, you've seen pictures of a barn where the livestock lived in one half and the family lived in the other half. This was quite typical in those days and my father didn't want that! So he worked until he was economically able, and where he could bring his wife to a decent place of living, and this is why he took so long.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And was that to your farm?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes. From a philosophic standpoint, my dad was very different. Nothing but the best was good. And he told this to his kids--he preached this to his kids. If you do anything, do it right, do it first-class, or don't do it at all! He was a very different type of person. He was very disciplinary in his ways, and of course, we feared him, too, because of the discipline. I think this is something that is sorely lacking today, we are very lax in discipline. We feared him, but we still loved our father, and I guess that is why the whole family has become something, because of his teachings, his philosophy, his wanting the best for his children.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was his background in Japan?

MR. HIRAOKA: He was a fisherman, and he didn't like that so he thought there was something better across the blue waters in a place called America. But he first stopped in Hawaii, but he didn't like the sugar beets and the menial type of thing you had to do. So he thought he'd come to the mainland. He was first a hired hand and then became a labor contractor, he had housing for his help, you know. But when he first went to work, Yoshino, it was $1 an hour from sunup to sunset, about 15 to 16 hours a day, and he realized that this was not going to get him anywhere. So then he became a labor contractor and he says, "Well, this is something else!" Of course, you have to exploit your own people to make a profit, and he didn't like exploiting his own people, so he bought his own farm of 20 acres and he expanded his acreage from that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did he do when he first came to the valley?

MR. HIRAOKA: He was a farm laborer. And, of course, he wasn't very familiar with the language and farmwork, and he did a lot of his work just guessing. He didn't know what a ladder was--when they told him to take this ladder to somewhere, else, well, he was just fortunate enough that it worked out. He did it right, and key people liked him.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You attended elementary school in Del Rey and high school in Selma in the years between 1919 and 1930. What do you recall about those years?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, we had a rough time in the elementary grades, because Japanese was our spoken language, and I had to learn the English language from scratch, and I think those are the only F's I ever received in school. But in a matter of about six months I learned it. I met my first-grade teacher, she's deceased now about 10 years—but somewhere along the line we had a Masonic picnic and her husband is a Mason. Of course she didn't know me from Adam after all those years--hadn't seen me all the years I was growing up. When one of my friends introduced her that was also her friend, and asked, "Do you remember Harry Hiraoka?" She said, "Oh yes! He was really something!" But evidently I learned quickly, and then I became the class leader, et cetera. She wondered why I didn't go into politics or something like that. She thought farming was the least of
what I should do.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It seems to me that you are a politician in spite of being a farmer.

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, politician--in a minor degree. I don't like politics

for the simple reason that you have to compromise. Once you get into the political arena you have to compromise to gain your ends, you know. And also, one of the reasons I never entered politics is--it's like the Mexican people or other ethnic minorities--there was a generation gap. I was in Mexico City about 1943 and I could see then, there were about five generations separating the Mexican people from the American people. Five generations! You don't bridge that five generations in one generation. I think this is the big problem the Hispanics have today, especially the Chicano. They have to bridge so much in so little time that they can't wait, they want it now, this isn't possible. The Japanese people had to do this too--they had to bridge the generation gap and customs. We had to become economically proficient, gain status, and from there, I think we are ready. But the Mexican people haven't acquired status, they have no economic status either, and to want something others have, it's not possible. And the language barrier was quite the thing, because Japanese was the spoken language. But once you set your heart to it, it's not a very hard matter. If you're going to compete, you have to gain the knowledge of the language. That's the only way you can compete. So I made up my mind I was going to learn the English language and I did--and in six months I was proficient.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's pretty good for a six-year old.

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes. Of course I memorized fast. I learned Spanish when I was five. I think I would have made a good mimic because I pick up things quickly. Even the Kumamoto-ben or Hiroshima-ben or whatever. I can become a natural because I can mimic very easily.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How about Kagoshima?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh yes. I can do that too, also Kyushu-ben. I can mimic all of them!

MRS. HASEGAWA: As a child, were there incidents or evidences of racial prejudice directed against you?

MR. HIRAOKA: Not so much in the elementary days. I think the big prejudices then were against the Germans, and what were we involved in then? World War I? So the Germans took the brunt of it. So I didn't notice too much prejudice. I don't know, I feel prejudice comes as a person grows. You feel it more. I wasn't aware of it as a child but when I went to high school I began to feel it because I wanted to join the DeMolays and that was closed to other ethnic groups. There were so many things you couldn't do--student body officers, you had to be white. I remember in high school I inquired of the Dean of Students at one time--if I wanted to teach Spanish in school could I get a job? And she said no, for those jobs you have to be Caucasian or white. So it was then when I really became aware that prejudice was there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you attend social functions when you were in high school?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, I attended social functions, but it was just a matter of tolerance, not so much of acceptance. They accepted you for your presence, but they never invited you to their homes at that time, or invited you to have dinner with them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: According to the article in the PACIFIC CITIZEN,

November 23, 1979, you were compelled as a result of your father's illness, to quit your education at Fresno State and take over your family's 80-acre ranch. What are some of the problems, difficulties, and responsibilities that confronted you, especially in view of the depression that gripped the country in the 30's?

MR. HIRAOKA: That was quite an ordeal for an 18-year old, because I was aware of the prejudice that existed, and especially when you had to go borrow money to operate your farm. There was a difference--there was a racial thing that existed, and you never got what you needed. And if they gave it to you, they limited you in time to repay the loan. It was quite difficult.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you think it was because you were Japanese that you had these problems?

MR. HIRAOKA: I think 90 percent of the problem was because of our ethnic origin. I would say so, yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to the Fowler Bank?

MR. HIRAOKA: No we were in Del Rey at that time. We did our banking with the First National Bank of Del Rey.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I thought if you were a part of the community that they would lend you the money because of the kind of a person you were -

MR. HIRAOKA: Of course, being as young as I was, I wasn't involved in too much community work at that time. And of course Del Rey was something else--it was mostly Danish and Armenians.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was Del Rey like? I understand there was a big Japanese community there.

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, my dad owned the big building there and it was a hotel. It was quite an edifice with a grocery store, Chinese restaurant, Chinese lottery--things were very wide-open and rampant in those days. And upstairs was a big hotel. And in those days the Volstead Act was in the picture and liquor was prohibited, and so moonshining work was very rampant. But Del Rey was very flourishing in those days. But somehow with the Depression and all, it just died, and Chinatown burned down, and after that it became a nonentity or a ghost town almost, except a place for Mexicans to live-- it's practically a Mexican town at present.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was it a minority town then? Were there no Caucasian business establishments?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, we had our Chinatown as it exists in other metropolitan areas--Chinatown was Chinatown, White Town was White Town. White Town still exists but it's all been taken over by Mexicans. The whites have all left. The only white establishment that exists today is the gasoline station.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then Del Rey was a big town!

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, it was big in business, not so much in people. There were packinghouses, both dried and fresh fruits. If you wanted moonshine, you could get it. If you wanted to gamble, it was there. It

served the demands of the people at that time. And they had Chinese food you know. Of course Mexican food was later--I think that came after World War II.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there an Armenian town?

MR. HIRAOKA: Not too much. Armenians didn't mingle too much. They'd get their place, and they only did what they had to do, and they came to the banks and they came to the grocery stores. They were more or less denied, the same as other ethnic groups, a place in society, as far as white people were concerned, so they more or less stayed in their place. They owned packinghouses, especially raisin processing and packaging.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In the same PACIFIC CITIZEN article mentioned earlier, it was noted that you helped finance the college education of your three younger brothers and three sisters. Would you say this concern for education was characteristic or typical of families of Japanese descent?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, I helped finance them, but I think the mandates came from my mother and father. And I think the Japanese family, especially the Issei, were dedicated that their children should get the best education possible. This would at least give them the chance to compete, and I think this was the whole thought in their minds. They were denied this so they made sure that their children got it if possible, and they did everything, even sacrificed, to give their children an education. I think you know that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your father passed away, but your mother is still there, isn't she?

MR. HIRAOKA: My mother is still living. She's 89-years old, and still living. Of course there was 18-years difference between my father and mother. My father worked on Monday, and he passed away on Wednesday. He died from apoplexy, a blood vessel in your brain bursts. He drove the tractor the day before he died, and mentally he was just sound--he went quickly, and he always said that was the way he wanted to go. Without suffering--that's the way he went.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then it was up to you to fulfill his wishes that all of the family be educated.

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, this is the way the Japanese family operates, you know. The older son takes over and does what he can, and even if it meant a sacrifice, this is what had to he done.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you think this was typical of the other ethnic groups that were in the area--that idea of education? Caucasians, included.

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh, I don't think so. This is something the Japanese culture mandates or provides, I believe they call it Bushido.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are your memories of December 7, 1941, and the consequent internment?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, I was really alarmed about it when I heard the news. I was really fearful, I didn't know what to expect--there was fear in me as to what the ultimate end would be. I knew there was going to be something, but I couldn't imagine

what it was going to be. It was something that shocked me, and for the first time I felt fear, because I knew there was something forthcoming after Pearl Harbor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: At that time you were already involved in farming?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes. Yes, I had a terminal in Los Angeles, I had trucks operating, I was well on my way to be what we all wanted to be at that time, an economic success.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were into trucking besides your farming?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, trucking, but not in the sense that I was trucking other people's fruit. I used to buy tree fruit and grapes, and then I'd get people to pack them, then I'd take it to my market in Los Angeles and sell them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What stands out in your mind most vividly when you and others of Japanese descent were imprisoned or put into these camps?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, like any other bureaucracy--it was a bureaucracy to a degree, because I remember the time wanted to leave this place because I had a place of employment, and it took me quite a while and I got no answers, so I made my own contacts, and I left in eight months. And of course it didn't please them because I didn't go through the channels of command. If I had done that I don't know when I would have gotten out of there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You contacted the WRA authorities?

MR. HIRAOKA: No, I contacted the Commanding General of the Eastern Defense Command. I wrote directly to the General and they gave me a clearance. I had the Quakers as my sponsors, you know, and I had a job waiting for me. It was no big problem. Of course the WRA also came into the picture.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you go?

MR. HIRAOKA: Moorestown, New Jersey. I worked on a farm there, apples, peaches -

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were these your friends, the Quakers?

MRS. HIRAOKA: No, I didn't know them from Adam. Of course I knew about the Quakers so I wrote directly to the Quaker office in Philadelphia, and after we got out my sister worked for the Quakers, the Friends' Society, so -

MRS. HASEGAWA: What camp did you go to?

MR. HIRAOKA: We were in Gila--Gila River. We left from Sanger Railway Station across the street from Barsotti's Hotel.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then when did you go to Philadelphia?

MR. HIRAOKA: Let's see. I was only in concentration camp for eight months, so it was in May of '43. I stayed in Moorestown, New Jersey until I got my clearance, again from the Western Defense Command, which

was in August 1944, that I could go home. I left New Jersey November 30, 1944, so I came home to Fowler on December 7, 1944.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In the meantime, what happened to your family?

MR. HIRAOKA: They were all with me. I called them all out and they were all with me in New Jersey.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you came back to California was your place still intact, was it still the same?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, I gave them all the proceeds so I just told them to take care of it. I had interplanted grapes with trees, peach trees. I had Malaga grapes and in those days Malagas were worth a lot of money, because they had to dry most grapes and Malaga wasn't a drying grape, so I believe the wineries paid $140- $150 a ton for them. I gave them all the crop, because I felt that no stealing was necessary. This gave them incentive to take care of the place, and all I asked them to do was to do a good job of taking care of it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And who took care of it?

MR. HIRAOKA: My neighbor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then when you came back everything was all right?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, but he didn't anticipate that we were going to come back and he was in hopes that he could acquire this property, too. This is what the white people thought--that we would never come back. So he was somewhat surprised when I came back.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Kind of put out, I suppose.

MR. HIRAOKA: I imagine, yes, I would say so.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then you didn't have any kind of prejudice when you came back?

MR. HIRAOKA: I had a lot of interviews--The Fresno Bee, and other news media wanted to know if I had any fears. I said, "If I had fears, I wouldn't be here!" I think the only ones I had to fear was some of the Johnny-come-latelys who came from Oklahoma, Texas, and other states and who didn't know the Japanese people and those who wanted their property. This happened in Orosi because they didn't know the Japanese, and if they did, they wanted their land. But I had no fears, and of course I had a host of friends also. No I wasn't afraid. What happens happens--I've always been a fatalist.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You didn't encounter this personal anti-Japanese feeling then?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, it was there. I went into a plumber's shop and they threw me out. Yes, it was there. And I stopped at a gasoline station and they said, "We don't serve Japs!" So I just said, "Thank you," and left--I made no big deal about it. After all, that's his privilege if he doesn't want to serve me. That fellow who threw me out of the gasoline station is a Shriner. He is a Mason and a Shriner. At that time of course, Japanese weren't Masons. I am a Shriner now, and many times he calls me and I have to give some kind of

excuse not to go with him because I haven't forgotten. People don't change that much. I have no antagonism, I just feel that I don't belong with him.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long did this anti-Japanese feeling persist after the war?

MR. HIRAOKA: I'd say about 10 years. Then treatment became normal. There were so many new people who came into the area that were the big agitators. People who knew you were--in a year or so, learned to accept, but the new people, some of them who had taken over Japanese farms, and they just didn't want us to come back! They rented it or some bought it for a song, so these people were mainly the agitators who were against our returning to California.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Among your civic activities, you noted your membership in the Fowler Lions Club between 1949 and 1960. Looking back those twelve years, what do you recall as being noteworthy with your involvement with that organization?

MR. HIRAOKA: They came to me in 1948, Yoshino, and said you should represent the Japanese and we'd like to have you as a member of the Lions. These were friends of mine. I said, that's fine. You and your son know me, and understand me, and accept me, but what about the rest of your membership? You know, it took them one year for them to come back to me? I said you better find out if their feeling is like yours-- that they'd like to have me as a member. It took them one year before they accepted my membership. Then from there in four years I was the president. One year after joining the club I was a director, then vice-president, president, then I became also zone chairman, and I was asked to be District Governor, but I didn't want that.

My life has been--a course at full saddle, everything I did I went all the way--I didn't stop in the middle! I went all the way to the top! But I think that this personifies that if somebody has something to give, then they can't hold you back. Leadership is leadership! And I think you are a born leader and I think it's something that's inherent that they can't deny you! They'd like to maybe, but they can't! Somewhere along the line it crops up that you were meant to lead, so they put you in the leadership position. I found this to be true.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You think people recognize that quality?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, I think so. People recognize leadership. You can see it even in your own children as to who has leadership and who hasn't. Some are followers and some are leaders. It's normal, you can't help it. It's the way the cookie crumbles. Everybody can't be leaders, but you have to have some leaders, so I think that you're born with the trait of leadership.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were first elected to the Board of Trustees of the Fowler Union Elementary School District in 1950, five years after the close of World War II, and subsequently re-elected to that position three times, serving until 1966. What prompted your running for re-election and what would you consider your major contributions to the school district and the community during those years?

MR. HIRAOKA: I don't think it was so much that I wanted it, it was the

people who said they needed me. Instead of asking me to succeed myself they called my family, especially my wife, and said, "We gotta have Harry. We don't want him to quit. Will you do everything within your power to see that he runs again?" This has been the story all along, even in the college arena, it isn't so much that I wanted to continue serving, the populace and the administration, the faculty and the classified, asked that I continue. I guess they appreciated what I did, so they called my family--even my daughter, after she grew up, they wouldn't call me. "Joyce, is it all right if I file for Harry?" Many times I'd be out of town, you know, so they just pushed my wife and my family.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You didn't have much choice.

MR. HIRAOKA: I didn't have much choice, no. But I enjoyed it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And what would you say were your major contributions to the school district?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, I think some of the biggest things were programs that were innovative, especially on the college level. The faculty had fringe benefits, major medical, vision, dental insurance, and the classified did not, so when I got on the board I said, "This can't he, you're all one family, you need one to serve the other, you need both." What's good for the faulty should also he good for the classified, so I got them the same fringe benefits and the same merit system that the faculty had. And I've been their fair-haired boy ever since! Because to me fair is fair!

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were defeated in your bid in 1966 for a position on the Unified School Board in Fowler when the elementary and high school districts were unified. What would you say was the cause for not being elected to that position when you had been so successful earlier?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, the public did not know what unification meant, especially in the Fowler area. Elementary school would survive, but the high school, if they lost Malaga, and Fresno City was making much ado about annexing Malaga. Had we lost Malaga, Fowler Union High School would die. So that's when we went to bat, because they were even borrowing money from the elementary school to buy buses and yet charging us for student rides. We were economically sound, but they weren't and if they lost the biggest tax base which was Malaga to Fresno, then they would cease to exist. So that was the reason I proposed unification--I was one of the proponents of unification. But the public didn't understand what unification meant--they thought it meant higher salaries for the superintendent, more buses, more staff, and higher salaries, that was the reason for my defeat. And then also, it was a contest between the high school trustees and the elementary school trustees, and the high school trustees were elected.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That same year, 1966, you were appointed to the Board of Trustees of the State Center Community College District. How did you come to be appointed and what do you remember about the status of the Community College District, its current problems, difficulties, and other prevailing circumstances at the time you became one of the trustees?

MR. HIRAOKA: The way I got on the College Board was ironic, because I

had talked to the incumbent trustee, who happened to be Mrs. Teilman from Selma at that time. She was one of the charter trustees. And just before she was killed in an automobile accident, I had occasion to talk to her and she said, "Harry, I want you to consider running for my position, because I'm not going to run again." And this was in April or May of that year. And she was killed in September. And a week after her death, the trustees at the State Center College District called me and said you have too much experience to be sitting on the sidelines, and we need your experience. So they appointed me to the hoard to take her place. And the biggest problems at the time were inadequate buildings and the need for more programs. We had just taken over the whole thing from Fresno Unified, and from the Reedley Unified School District, and that was about the time that the Community College began to flourish. And it became a philosophy of never-ending training. You can always help rehabilitate yourself, you can go into new and different kinds of jobs if you aren't happy with the kind of jobs you have been doing, so I was very strong in proposing adequate buildings and innovative programs. And today, Fresno City campus is one of the most beautiful campuses in the State of California, because of the new buildings. Reedley is also a beautiful campus. Have you seen Fresno?

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh yes!

MR. HIRAOKA: And I even fought with my fellow board members! I said, "Let's put on a three-year tax of say, 40 cents on the hundred, which will complete all of our buildings, programs." That didn't complete all of them because Proposition 13 came into the picture before we could finish, but it gave us 90-percent. And you know I twisted their arms and finally got them to go. If we hadn't done that, with Prop 13, I don't know where we would be today. I said, please, it's going to hurt, and we're going to have to sell to the people why we're doing this, but the populace bought it and the board went along with it and we were successful in putting all those new buildings together. And I think it was very fortunate! Of course we never knew Prop 13 was lurking in the dark, you know!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Since 1968, you have been actively involved with the California State Community College serving as its Vice-President and then President, and in the advisory capacity for the Chancellor of the State Community Colleges. What prompted you to become so actively involved in this area?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, it wasn't a question of my wanting to--it was a question of others wanting me. And I had turned it down for many years until there was a black trustee from Compton named Henry Dawkins, who had served as President of the State group, and he said, "Harry, we need you," so I said, "All right if you need me, that's something else." So then I decided that I would go. It wasn't so much that I wanted the glory--my peers said, "Hey, we need your services!" That's the reason I accepted. I have never sought anything—they chose that I should go. The only thing I sought was I wanted to be a Mason--I think that was about the only thing I really wanted. Other than that, everything was just wished on to me.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In the November 6, 1979 General Election, you were one of three State Center Community College District's incumbent trustees who was returned to office by a wide margin. When you ran for re-election at that time, you were accused of "racism" particularly by

members of the local area Mexican- American community. What would you say regarding these charges and your outlook in such matters?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, when the Mexican-Americans say someone is a racist, I think it's just a pattern. Anything that would take something away from whatever they are getting or the jobs that they have, they call you a racist--I think it's fear--I don't think it's racism--that they call anyone who does that type of thing a racist. And I don't think that I can be called a racist because of the very things that I have pushed. We have the vocational training program which is 90-percent Mexican-American. They have financial aids, they get money to attend school through C.E.T.A. If I were a racist do you suppose that I would propose such a thing? I proposed and sold to the board members the idea that we have to help underprivileged students to learn a trade such as welding, tune-up, and auto overhaul. If I were a racist, then I don't think I would be doing this. But the very thing that I talked about before, Yoshino, that they are about five generations behind us, is the problem. They're not proficient in their jobs, yet they would like to have your salary, you know, it just isn't possible. I'm not saying that I'm against the Chicano, I'm questioning the fact that whether the Bilingual Education as proposed and working today is not successful because all it creates is a job security for teachers--many unqualified. They don't care about the students, but only for their jobs. It's the teachers that make the biggest noise, and they are very protective of their jobs, whether they're qualified or not qualified. The same is for Affirmative Action. I have no quarrel with Affirmative Action--I don't believe you need it! If you're qualified you ought to get the job! Black, white, or blue, or red or what! Of course they want it because they want some kind of a protective cover. And no, I would say that I'm not a racist. If I can advance people to participate in our society, I'm here to help them. But if they are not academic students then they should go into Voc. Tech. This is all I said, and they took it out of context. And I guess I was getting close to their nest, so they had to attack!

MRS. HASEGAWA: I notice you' received a lot of support from the other side.

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, this becomes a backlash of the polarization of Bilingualism, you see. The more they talked, the more votes I got! And I stayed silent because the more they talked, the more votes I got, and I don't know whether they realized this or not. But they were segregating themselves. There was a backlash, you see, and the pendulum swings back. I knew this, but I don't think they understood it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Apart from your involvement with the community colleges and in agriculture, you have been significantly active in Masonic Lodge work. It is our understanding that you were among the very first Nisei to serve as Worshipful Master in the United States. What would you care to relate regarding your involvement in Masonic Lodge work, and other fraternal lodge activities?

MR. HIRAOKA: Yoshino, that was something I wanted more than anything else--to become a Mason. Because I went through the Lions group, and I went through the trustee group, and everybody that was anybody of stature was a Mason. And I said, "Hey, if this is true of this fraternity, then there must be something about the fraternity that draws this type of people together." I wanted this, and of course I could have

joined in Philadelphia in 1943, but I didn't want it that way. If I was good enough to become a Mason, I wanted to become a Mason in my hometown. So, I had to wait until 1957 before they would accept me. Of course in my high school days I wanted to join DeMolay, which is a youth group of the Masonic Order, but I was denied that. Then in 1957, somebody told me, "Harry, you have a 50-50 chance, so why don't you give me your application." So I did, and I went through with flying colors. But the reason I made it was that I had people in education and in other walks of life that I had known for years and years, and they said if you turn Harry down, you might as well close this lodge because we're not practicing what we are taught. There were eight people that spoke on my behalf on my application. I think that was the reason I was accepted.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there a clause that said Japanese were not acceptable to the Masons?

MR. HIRAOKA: No, it was prejudice, other than white was not acceptable. That was Elks, not Masonic Lodge. Only it's an unwritten clause. Blacks are the only ones who are
denied membership. Of course they have their own Masonic group. No, it was still prejudice. The Elks had a clause in their bylaws that nonwhite are not acceptable.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I'd say that you did blaze a trail for Japanese.

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, that was the reason why I took all the offices. I didn't want all these offices, but I also didn't want these people to say that these Japanese people just want to be joiners, and not do any of the work. So I went through the chairs. Of course I was asked by the Secretary, the Master did not ask me, but the Secretary said, "Harry, you have all the necessary ingredients for leadership. You memorize well, and you should get in line." So I said fine. I became Master in 1963. And at that time I think Dr. James Tanaka of Stockton became Master of Channel Lodge in Stockton. There were only four Nisei Masters at that time, so I was one of the first.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of work do the Masons do?

MR. HIRAOKA: It's philanthropic work. You have your Burn Centers, you have the Children's Hospital, and then we have an Orphans Home in Los Angeles for the children who are orphans. And then we have a home for old-age people. You can go there, people that want to. Instead of going to a Convalescent Home you can go there, but you have to be a member, or a member's wife.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then it's very exclusive?

MR. HIRAOKA: No, it isn't exclusive. This is where the story is wrong. All you have to do is you have to believe in a Supreme Being. That's the only prerequisite. And Buddhists can join--they believe in Buddha, and Buddha is a Supreme Being, so they're acceptable. You have to believe in a Supreme Being, that's all it is. The Jewish people can belong. All you have to do is believe in some superior power. That's the one thing that they ask of you. They don't care whether you are poor or wealthy. But you must come well recommended.

MRS. HASEGAWA: With respect to agriculture, your farm has been operated by the Hiraoka family for three generations. What would you say

have been among the most important developments and trends in fruit development in this Central San Joaquin Valley? Those that you and your family have experienced.

MR. HIRAOKA: The biggest change would be in tree fruit. When I took over for my dad it was just grapes and a few kinds of peaches--Elberta peaches, Hale peaches, add Santa Rosa plums. But as time went on I had to change my planting, because if you're going to progress you have to have change. So then I went to nectarines, then plums. When I got out of camp, I had a chance to go through the Southern states, Carolina and Georgia. It's nothing but peaches grown there, and we can't compete with them. From the standpoint of labor, labor wages, and the way they package them and the proximity of the market, we just couldn't! And only in California can you grow plums and the nectarines. People thought I should go to some kind of sick hospital because I was grafting these beautiful peach trees and changing them over to nectarines. But in due time they caught right on--they knew why I was doing it. But at one time they thought I was crazy. But I think you have to move, you can't stay status-quo. You have to look for something else which is better, to improve yourself.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were a leader in that area, too.

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes, I was one of the first in the nectarine business. Then of course I was creating new varieties, too. I had a knack of creating new varieties so that was part of it too. I didn't do it so much for commercialism, but just the fact that I like to see one change from another, and this type of thing. And I specifically went for flavorsome of them went for color and beauty, but I went for flavor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are some of the different kinds of hybrids that you have developed?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh, I had the Royal Flame Nectarine, and the Royal Haven Peach, and the Early Flame Nectarine, and I had the Hiraoka Flame Peach. I have several patents, but some of them I didn't patent because I did it for the fun of it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are these marketed now with those same names?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, times change, and others have taken over. It's a never-ending search for the better! Better color, better flavor, bigger size.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you still have time for that?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh, once in a while, but I don't do much of it anymore. I used to go fishing, but I don't have time for that either.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You have long been involved as a trustee in public education in California in the elementary and community college levels. What would you say, from your vantage point of 30 years of experience, are the most significant developments and trends in public education in California, especially in Fresno County and the Central San Joaquin Valley?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, I think the biggest change is the change from academic to Voc. Tech. There's where the Community College came into

being to retrain people, and also to train people to work with their hands, because everybody can't be professionals. Everybody can't be attorneys or doctors or nurses, so you have to learn to work with your hands. And I think the biggest thing was to give dignity to the people who worked with their hands! I think this was the biggest changeover, the biggest acceptance by society. And job training --what is it they say--once in every six years you have to be retrained for a new job? Either the job is passe or it's out of the picture, or it's no longer needed. When I got on the Board of the Community College, this is one of the biggest things I stressed, to teach people to learn a trade, to work with their hands. We need these people, they are a part of society.

And we must teach the public to give dignity to these people. So I think this was one of the biggest changes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And a very important one. What do you see as the future development in public education?

MR. HIRAOKA: I'm kind of scared or I have some fears, I should say. You know President Carter created this new Department of Education and a cabinet position for the Secretary of Education, and now the fears come from maybe they're going to give tax money to private and sectarian schools. And a lot of stress will be on Bilingual Education and minority nutrition. And my biggest fear is where will all this money come from? The ideas are good, but I think the biggest thing that I dread is they're including social services in Education, which should be funded from another Service. They are taking money from the educational fund to fund these social service programs. I don't think you should deprive education by taking away money. But I think if you are going to do all these social services programs, like the handicapped programs, minority nutrition, these belong in another department..not education.

I've already seen Secretary Hufstadler saying they're going to mandate minority fair play. I think they're going to polarize things and take us to places we don't want to be. I don't think you can legislate this type of education, nor can you legislate people to like you or legislate economic security. It came from the heart.

MRS. HASEGAWA: From the heart.

MR. HIRAOKA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were a Board Member for 25 years, and an Inspector for the Voting Precinct, Magnolia and Norris, for 25 years. Would you like to tell us about that?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, that was a very interesting thing because you meet so many people from all walks of life of diversified cultures and beliefs. The ballot machine replaced the hand-marked ballots. But I think it's something that everyone should at least once, do. Because it's very interesting, you notice how people think, where they come from, where they're going. I think it gives you a whole character test of people. You see samplings of true patriotism.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Since you began in 1945, and you have seen the trends in voting, would you say that more people are voting than voted back then?

MR. HIRAOKA: No, no I don't think so. I think they only vote if people

that they want are on the ballot. If the person they want isn't on the ballot, then I don't think they care. But I think the big thing is, you know bilingual ballots came into the picture, and I was fortunate in my district that the Mexican-Americans said, "We don't need them," so I've never had to worry about bilingual ballots or anything else. But you learn about people. I think they vote only if something is on the ballot that they want or do not want.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You have received many honors throughout your life. Would you like to share some of them--I know there is a whole list of them.

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, I think the one I prize most is the Golden Apple I got from the Superintendents of Fresno County, elementary superintendents. It's a miniature apple in gold. And some of the others were--there's one Resolution from Richard Lehman, the Assemblyman, and another Resolution from the Senate, Rose Ann Vuich. And also I have a Scottish-Rite Educator of the Year Award. These are some of them. I have a whole slew of them. I recently got the Tiger Award for Distinguished Service from Kings River Community College and one for serving as President of the California Community College Trustees on the state level, so –

MRS. HASEGAWA: Well, I certainly congratulate you!

MR. HIRAOKA: Thank you, thank you.

MRS. HASEGAWA: On the more personal side, please tell us about your family, how you met your wife, what she does, about your children, their names and what they do.

MR. HIRAOKA: How I met my wife is quite a funny thing. You know with my connections in the markets and what have you, I got to know very many people and one of the field representatives, Mr. Takeuchi, for Consolidated Produce out of Los Angeles was over one day and wanted me to ship him some peaches. I wasn't packing that day so he said, "Do you want to go for a ride?" So I went with him to the Lindsay-Orosi area. Then he introduced me to this Nanamura family in Lindsay and Joyce was one of the daughters there. Then he introduced me to her, and I guess the mother took a liking to me, whatever happened, and I was invited back. And from there things went on and we became engaged and we were married. This was in June, and in September we were married, 1948.

I was 36 and she was 27. But one of the things I realize today is the more mature the couple is, the children are more secure. So I think this is all reflected on your kids. The more stable you are financially, and in other ways, I think this all reflects on your children.

And my daughter is 28. I got her a job five years ago. She said she'd like to try some department store work. So she became a clerk, started at $3 an hour and then she worked her way clear to the buyer's position.

MRS. HASEGAWA: For what company?

MR. HIRAOKA: Gottschalks. She buys for the Linen Department and she buys for seven stores. She makes frequent trips to each store to see that everything is going on well.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is her name?

MR. HIRAOKA: Debra Jo Hiraoka. She was married, but it didn't work out, so she had her marriage annulled. My boy, Verne, he's thirty. It was ironic because he wanted to teach, and he was teaching history at Fowler High School and he was also coaching baseball and basketball. With this Bilingual Eduaction type of thing, he lost his job to this bilingual teacher! Who was also a baseball coach, you know, so he became soured after that. I never pushed him into the farming business because I don't think that anyone should be pushed--if they want it, that's something else. I think a lot of unhappiness comes when people are pushed into something that they aren't fit to do, or that they don't like. You have to like something. He said, "Dad, I want to try my fling at farming." And I guess he liked it because he's kept on for three years now. Of course I set him up so he has no problems, financially or otherwise. If he wants a harvest crew, the harvest crew comes, and if he needs money he goes to Tenneco-West, who finance him. So it's a lot different than in my day. I had to get on my hands and knees and beg the manager of the bank to give me some money!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is he married?

MR. HIRAOKA: No, he's still single. But I don't push him. Here again, I was married late in life, and it's none of my business to push.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What changes have you seen in the activities and problems of Japanese-Americans during your life?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh, I think theres been quite a few changes. I think they've become a lot more articulate, more American. They've learned to face people, to get into the public sphere, take part. You see it all the time. Look at Harry Kubo, George Kitahara, they're all doing well in public life. I think we've become a part of the American Society. I don't think ethnicity has anything to do with being a part of society. If you have leadership, I don't care what ethnic group it is, you will belong! It's just what you can deliver that decides whether you belong.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Have you been involved in any Japanese organizations?

MR. HIRAOKA: I was the Charter Vice-President of the Fowler Japanese Americans Citizens League. There again I guess the Japanese youngsters hadn't grown up yet. We were very provincial. We talked about this person did this so he deserved bad luck, or whatever. I didn't like that sort of thing. That's what got me out of the Citizens Group. I was a member of the Japanese Congregational Church in Fresno, then I felt that if I were going to be part of the community, I should belong to the church in Fowler, so I joined the First Presbyterian Church in Fowler, now the United Presbyterian Church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you do to maintain your Japanese identity?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh, we have Japanese friends, we go to visit my in-laws and go to Japanese restaurants. We're still part of the Japanese culture. I don't think you lose that. You're still proud to be Japanese whether you like it or not.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you observe any kind of customs in your daily life?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh yes, we still observe Oshogatsu and other events. We haven't gotten away from all of that. I think the thing to do is retain the good things. I think it's a terrible thing that a lot of the youngsters can't make sushi and other delicacies. These are the things we should cultivate, and keep up with things that are good to retain.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you see as the future of the Japanese?

MR. HIRAOKA: Oh, I think we've arrived! When Senator Hayakawa was elected to the United States Senate, then I think all things are possible! It all depends on the individual, what he wants to do, where, how. I think we have arrived and we must get involved.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview? Something for the future?

MR. HIRAOKA: Well, I would stress the fact that the Japanese, if they are capable leaders, they should get involved--not hold back. And run for office. I think we're getting this type of direction now, but I think there's a future for us in everything and we should take advantage of it, and play a big part in the future of this great nation.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you very much for a very, very good interview.

MR. HIRAOKA: You're welcome!