

INTERVIEW OF RICHARD F. TAITANO

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: Richard F. Taitano has been kind enough to consent to be interviewed about his days on Guam and in the Kennedy Administration. Thank you very much, sir, for being available.
- Taitano: You're quite welcome.
- Willens: Could you give us a little background as to how you came to be part of the Kennedy Administration?
- Taitano: Not through politics, definitely.
- Willens: It was not through politics?
- Taitano: No, definitely not. I was a confirmed bureaucrat. In fact, my college study at the University in Pennsylvania was in how to be an enlightened bureaucrat.
- Willens: So, you were educated at the University of Pennsylvania?
- Taitano: Yes. One year in graduate study there in governmental administration.
- Willens: When did you graduate?
- Taitano: I didn't finish. I didn't put in my thesis. Part of the program is 18 months of internship with the government. I returned to Guam for that internship in 1951. So I never bothered [finishing] because I had to make a living. One of the conditions is during the internship I had to get the lowest pay in the government.
- Willens: Did you go to work then for the Interior Department?
- Taitano: Later. But, before I came out here, one of the conditions is that I spend a few months with Interior before I start my work with the government of Guam as an intern for the University program.
- Willens: So you worked in Guam for a while for the government?
- Taitano: Yes, after school.
- Willens: After you finished school?
- Taitano: How I got into the Department of the Interior, the answer is very simple. I was a trade for Governor Daniel. I don't know whether you are familiar with the administration of Governor Daniel. They tried to appoint him to be Governor of the Virgin Islands, you know. There were blacks there, so they had a demonstration against it. Drew Pearson was writing certain articles, I think two or three columns about Daniel, about how he was off his rocker. So, they had to find a place for Daniel. Vice President Johnson was entitled to part of the patronage, you know. So, he got the job in Guam. They thought the Guamanians were going to stage a protest, to march, which they did in the Virgin Islands. They had a torch parade against Daniel. So, in order to pacify the Guamanians I think the former governor of Guam was asked who to recommend from Guam to send up to Interior in exchange for Daniel to Guam. They picked up poor little old me.
- Willens: So you became the Director of the Office of Territories?

- Taitano: Well, when they did that I don't suppose they anticipated something like a Chamorro like me to be up there, because the minute I was there, the first thing I told the Secretary of the Interior was that the people of Guam have the right to decide what they want to be. And they said, "Even if they decide to go to hell," and I said, "Yes, even that right."
- Willens: That was Secretary Udall?
- Taitano: Udall.
- Willens: Did you find him responsive to the problems of the Territory?
- Taitano: Oh, yes, very responsive. Then you had a wonderful Assistant Secretary Carver, the territories came under him. He also was very responsive.
- Willens: There are documents that suggest in early 1962 Interior and State got together at the staff level and decided there was a need to re-examine policy here in Micronesia.
- Taitano: Exactly.
- Willens: Did you participate in that task force discussion?
- Taitano: Well, I don't know. There are many levels of discussion, but I certainly was a part of the task force set up by the National Security Council.
- Willens: Was that after the President issued his National Security Action Memorandum declaring that U.S. policy would be to make Micronesia part of the United States, if possible, through a plebiscite?
- Taitano: No, I am not familiar with that.
- Willens: You're not familiar with that?
- Taitano: They wouldn't have shown me that. Anything that would lead toward annexation, they wouldn't have shown it to me.
- Willens: You do not remember being informed of any National Security Action Memorandum setting forth American policy toward Micronesia?
- Taitano: No, I don't remember that initiative specifically. I'm familiar with the Action Memorandum which requires that we review all our policies to gradually lead the Micronesians in Guam into what they determined at that time was the 20th century mainstream.
- Willens: Were there differences between the Interior Department and State as to how to deal with Micronesia?
- Taitano: Yes, to some extent and actually was in State it was primarily, I think, via the, what do you call that agency, the spy agency?
- Willens: The CIA.
- Taitano: They want to make concessions you know. One of the first things that we did, when we came out here for the inauguration of Daniel, was to get Saipan and the Trust Territory out of the military.
- Willens: Yes. You supported that transfer?
- Taitano: Not only supported that, but I got so angry when we came out, then we went to Saipan, the first time they ever allowed me to land in Saipan.
- Willens: They would not let you land in Saipan without a permit from the Navy?
- Taitano: As a citizen of Guam. They wouldn't even give me a permit to go to Saipan.

- Willens: Even though you were head of the Interior?
- Taitano: No, no, no, no. While I was a citizen of Guam, before I became head. When I became a head, we'd have the Assistant Secretary for International Organizations, Harlan Cleveland. There was quite a group of us. We went to Saipan and we just told them we are going to get the CIA out of Saipan. When we got back, we got them out.
- Willens: The administration of the Trust Territory was moved from the Navy to the Interior Department in 1962.
- Taitano: And then we moved the headquarters from Guam to Saipan.
- Willens: Did you support those steps?
- Taitano: Not only did I support, but I was with them.
- Willens: Why do you think they were important steps to take?
- Taitano: Well, for one thing, in the administration of the Trust Territory, we think it is unbecoming to have the headquarters outside of the Trust Territory. You know, first they had it in Hawaii, then they moved it to Guam. Then, under the Kennedy Administration, we moved it out of Guam and put it in the Trust Territory. At that time, as you recall, or as you perhaps know, the United Nations was just starting its decolonization movement. I think in December of the previous year they adopted the resolution setting up the decolonization movement.
- Willens: There had been a 1961 visiting mission report that was quite critical of the United States' handling of the Trusteeship and they recommended, among other things, that the capital be moved. Did you think that that U.N. mission report contributed to the U.S. decision?
- Taitano: Oh, yes, definitely. And we were working wonderfully at that time with the State Department on these things.
- Willens: Now, Harlan Cleveland told me that it's hard to imagine today how important the United Nations was to the United States in the early 1960s. Was that your impression too?
- Taitano: Yes. I appeared before the U.N. Trusteeship Council once as a special advisor to the U.N. delegation, and the Washington delegation said to me, aren't you embarrassed to be a part of the U.S. colony?
- Willens: What did you say?
- Taitano: Well, as Harlan Cleveland said, I am not embarrassed to be a citizen of the richest, most powerful country on this earth. What else could I say?
- Willens: That seems like a fair answer.
- Taitano: In an exchange like that, remember that while I was there, in Interior, my biggest problem is how to reconcile my loyalty to the islands and my loyalty to the federal government. That battle, all the time. Anything that was given to me, what would my Chamorros think?
- Willens: Were the people here in Guam expecting you to make some changes with respect with the Guam status?
- Taitano: Oh, definitely. Not only Guam, but even Micronesia. And believe me, I was so alone.
- Willens: How long were you at Interior in the Office of Territorial Affairs?
- Taitano: Until shortly after Kennedy died.

- Willens: Nearly three years.
- Taitano: As soon as they got Bill Daniel out of Guam, they had no need for me.
- Willens: Was Ruth Van Cleve working for you as your deputy at the time?
- Taitano: No, she was our solicitor.
- Willens: Did she play an active role during your tenure in developing policy for Micronesia?
- Taitano: No.
- Willens: Did you have any relations with her with respect to Micronesia in subsequent years?
- Taitano: Subsequent years, no. While I was there, she was advising us on U.S. territorial problems, legal questions and all those things. But, with respect to Micronesia, that was my dealings mostly with the State Department.
- Willens: Some of the correspondence that I've seen between Assistant Secretary Carver and the State Department suggest that there were many differences between the two agencies.
- Taitano: Later.
- Willens: I think that's right. One question was whether the people of Micronesia were ready for self-government, and the Interior Department said in essence, no, we don't think they are ready for self-government. Then, the State Department, under the influence of the United Nations decolonization movement, was saying we have to make them ready and that they are ready to assume more self-government. Was that debate going on while you were there?
- Taitano: Not to the extent of arguing about it. But Carver, it didn't take him too long to get that whole Department of Interior attitude of, you know, we want to increase our jurisdiction.
- Willens: Is that the way you would characterize Interior Department's policies?
- Taitano: While I was there they had this little island in the Caribbean that the State Department is giving up—just a little old island, a piece of rock. Interior wanted to take over immediately. You know one of the first things that I told Assistant Secretary Carver of our Administration when I got to Washington, maybe just a week after I got to Washington, what is my recommendation as far as the organization is concerned. I said abolish my office.
- Willens: You did not think there was any need for such an office?
- Taitano: I felt the office as an agency holds back progress politically and even economically.
- Willens: One criticism that I see
- Taitano: Wait, you didn't ask me what will happen then if there's no office. Logically, that is the next question.
- Willens: That is the next question. And what do you think would have happened, should have happened?
- Taitano: Like Puerto Rico, who supervises Puerto Rico?
- Willens: It's done by somebody out of the White House nominally, but in fact nobody does it.
- Taitano: That's what I'm saying.
- Willens: That's what you think was appropriate for Guam and the Virgin Islands?

- Taitano: Sure. If Puerto Rico could do it, why couldn't we do it?
- Willens: Well, that's exactly right. Your advocacy of that must have put you at odds with the people in the Interior Department.
- Taitano: They were happy when they got rid of me, I think.
- Willens: Was Congressman Aspinall on the Hill at that time?
- Taitano: Yes.
- Willens: There are people who say that Interior's policy toward Micronesia and Guam was more or less dictated by Congressman Aspinall. What do you think about that? Is that true?
- Taitano: Oh, yes.
- Willens: What were his views about how to deal with Micronesia?
- Taitano: It's U.S. territory, we got it, American blood was spilled, and the United Nations doesn't have a damned thing to say about it. Now, as far as Puerto Rico commonwealth, to Aspinall under the fourth clause of the Constitution, it's a territory, period, a possession.
- Willens: Were the people at Interior deferential to Congressman Aspinall?
- Taitano: Oh, yes, they were.
- Willens: Including people up to Carver's level and Udall?
- Taitano: Up to Carver and Udall. See, without him nothing could go through. The chairmen of committees at that time in Congress, they are all powerful.
- Willens: Much more powerful than they are today.
- Taitano: Oh, yes, you didn't have the young bucks that you have now. Before, they were just old people. You had to earn so many credits for all the years of service. They were asking me what's the best way to get Guam all at once; I said to kill all of the Senators first.
- Willens: Well, it was during your tenure then that the Solomon Commission was started and came out to visit. Did you come out as part of that?
- Taitano: Oh, yes, I was a member there.
- Willens: Could you tell me what they did in Micronesia?
- Taitano: I was made a member, in deference, you know, to Interior. You know what they gave me to do?
- Willens: What?
- Taitano: To study how many typewriters each office needs out here.
- Willens: How many what?
- Taitano: Typewriters.
- Willens: And what were the other members of the Commission doing?
- Taitano: Oh, they were going in to study the economy, political development. As far as I recollect, they never showed me the finished copy of the Part I of the Solomon Report, the political draft.
- Willens: Did you draft any portions of the report?
- Taitano: Yes.

- Willens: Including the portion about the typewriters.
- Taitano: That's why I drafted it. How many typewriters each office needs.
- Willens: Now, you may be interested to know that other members of the Commission never saw the final report, either. Who do you think wrote the final report?
- Taitano: Tony Solomon and a member from the National Security Council.
- Willens: Who was that? Do you remember his name?
- Taitano: I don't remember him.
- Willens: There was a representative of the National Security Council who you think quite an active role in actually drafting the report. We, one of my colleagues, has interviewed Professor Cooper, who was a young economist then.
- Taitano: Yes.
- Willens: He and Dr. Mangone, who was at Syracuse; both of them said that they never saw a copy of the report and they thought that the chairman probably wrote it. Was the report critical of the Interior Department?
- Taitano: Well, very nicely critical. It just says, well, you haven't given this enough money so put more money here. You haven't done this, put more money here. That was the extent of his criticism.
- Willens: Why do you think the commission was appointed by President Kennedy? Where did the idea come from? Do you know?
- Taitano: From my office.
- Willens: Harlan Cleveland thought the commission was a good idea, too. Do you remember any discussions between the two of you?
- Taitano: Yes. Not between us, personally, though occasionally I saw him. He asked me to go out, you know, to Micronesia several times. I had to deal mostly with his underlings. And the idea actually was to offset the military department's stronghold in Washington, particularly up at the Hill. I think the military had the only agency that is permitted to have a lobbyist with offices in the Capitol.
- Willens: We haven't talked about the Defense Department. Do you feel that they were exercising influence at that time about policy here?
- Taitano: The Navy under Connally and under Vice President Johnson. The only way you can break through that combination is through the National Security Council and the White House. And as you know, the Vice President, the so-called Johnson faction, and the Kennedy faction weren't too palsy-walsy.
- Willens: Defense seems to have been perfectly satisfied with the status quo.
- Taitano: Not only that, but they wanted to go back some more.
- Willens: Did they want to have the Navy retake jurisdiction over Saipan?
- Taitano: If they had their ways, they'd have the entire area under the military and still have it closed. And this is historically true, even from 1898 up to the present time. The only time the Defense Department will support a policy of giving the area more autonomy or more economic improvement is after the deal is done. And then they come out with their support. But before the deal is done, they are under-table dealings up in the Capitol. And believe me, there are a group of lobbyists that is almost unconquerable. Well, my Senate

- Chairman, the Committee on Interior, had for his messengers, generals and admirals. They're being driven around in limousines by admirals or generals.
- Willens: That's a very powerful force to deal with.
- Taitano: Right.
- Willens: What happened to the Solomon Commission report? It was filed shortly before President Kennedy was assassinated, and there are those who say that it was simply ignored after the assassination.
- Taitano: Well, we had a hearing up at the Hill.
- Willens: Do you remember, was there a hearing? I haven't seen any record of that.
- Taitano: Oh, yes. We had a hearing. It's one of those orientation hearings at the beginning of the session. And we had Harlan Cleveland up there. I remember now, he was asked by this Congressman from Washington, State of Washington. What's his name? Very conservative. Harlan Cleveland spoke out about the U.N. side of our obligation. This Congressman turns and says, "I bet you don't have in your briefcase a copy of the U.S. Constitution." And he did not. Well, that's the kind of attitude that we had to cope with all the time. No, we went up there and we briefed the committee on what we wanted to do—not the political part.
- Willens: There was an effort through the Executive Branch to increase funding in a very substantial way in the early 1960s. I mean, \$7 million to \$15 million. Did you think that those increases in funding were important steps forward?
- Taitano: Well, let me put it this way. That's one of the first things that I wanted to do is to increase the funding. It's so unrealistic. The funds they were sending to the Trust Territory were only enough to pay for the operation of the ships, the airplanes and the bureaucrats. That's all. No money for education, hardly any, except a few teachers. And that's only for the high school.
- Willens: And you were successful to some extent in getting additional funding. Did you want a lot more money out here than Congress was willing to provide?
- Taitano: Well, you had to be realistic when you go to Congress because you have to be able to show them that you can spend it in one year. The first thing, and this is where I can claim some credit, I had the President revise the policy of education and health toward Micronesia. We drafted the policy and sent it up to the White House and the President released it. We wanted to extend elementary schooling all over the islands in Micronesia. We want MDs to come out here and help the medical practitioners. But my biggest problem is not with Congress. My biggest problem is with the Trust Territory bureaucrats.
- Willens: Why was that?
- Taitano: Because they said if you send out MDs, it would be an insult to the practitioners.
- Willens: To the local people who are not MDs, but were trained someplace else.
- Taitano: I said to them, if you send out money for the schooling, what are they going to do after they get educated?
- Willens: The Administration was saying there are no jobs for educated people here?
- Taitano: Correct. And then the third thing is they're not bright enough to catch up.
- Willens: The Micronesians aren't smart enough to

- Taitano: Right. To need the education. To be able to absorb it.
- Willens: It doesn't sound as though the Trust Territory Administration then was sympathetic to the policies that you were implementing.
- Taitano: The previous High Commissioner was appointed under the Eisenhower Administration. He was able to recommend to reduce the \$5 million appropriation down to \$4 million.
- Willens: He recommended that?
- Taitano: Yes. And he was appointed because of that. That's the Eisenhower Administration, my friend.
- Willens: Well, now, who was the first appointee? Was it Goding?
- Taitano: Under Kennedy.
- Willens: Now, was he different? Did he have a different attitude?
- Taitano: No, his problem was that he maintained the old Trust Territory bureaucrats. He had an anthropologist advising him. Don't change things, we need them to remain as they are so that we can study them more.
- Willens: You think that continued to be Trust Territory policy since the 1960s?
- Taitano: You know what I had to do? Boy, they really hated me for it. They had this previous High Commissioner as my consultant in Washington who recommended the reduction of the budget. I asked him, you go out to the new Commissioner and tell him to make an estimate of how much money they needed for schools, for health and all.
- Willens: Did he do that?
- Taitano: He did, but then after he got back he resigned and went to another agency. We remained on talking terms, but I know that he considered it inappropriate, particularly coming from a Chamorro.
- Willens: Well, some of the moneys were obtained by Congress.
- Taitano: Sure. That, right away, right away one of the first things that I did when I got there is to send up an amending measure to increase the ceiling from \$5 million to \$15 million. That was drafted in my office, by my own lawyer.
- Willens: And you had support from the Administration, from the White House and the Bureau of the Budget at that time?
- Taitano: Yes.
- Willens: Was the money well spent in your judgment?
- Taitano: Well, \$15 million, and then we had to send in a supplemental that year to bring it up to \$15 million. See, this is the problem that I had to deal with Congress. They had the money, but they don't have the expertise to do it.
- Willens: The expertise to spend the money and build the schoolrooms and do it efficiently.
- Taitano: Right.
- Willens: I've seen some documents criticizing the way the money was spent—school houses built without bathrooms and so forth.
- Taitano: Well, but that is even better than these bathrooms that we found when I got in here. When I became Director of Territories, I went out and made survey visits.

- Willens: Did you visit all the districts?
- Taitano: All the district centers, yes. Some of them, schools, for floors just soil. For instance, I found in Yap, this is how they select the teachers: the chiefs line up the young men and said, now it's your turn this year to be the teacher. Now, as required by the United Nations, we have to make a count of how many students. So all those of compulsory school age, they were all lined up and they were counted. And then after that they went home. Then we bought books for them. The following year we came back and the books were still in the packages because nobody knows how to read English. It was miserable.
- Willens: There was a suggestion made early on that the Peace Corps might come out. They didn't come out until 1966.
- Taitano: Yes. I went to see Shriver to help us.
- Willens: What was the reaction?
- Taitano: Shriver? Oh, he was willing until we got up to Congress, and then this Congressman from Florida, of course he had a point.
- Willens: What did he say?
- Taitano: He said that the Peace Corps is for help outside the United States.
- Willens: And he said the Trust Territory is not a foreign country and therefore the Peace Corps should not be there.
- Taitano: Right. He put up such a stink that we finally just dropped it because he [Shriver] didn't want to endanger the rest of his program. He had to curry favor of this Congressman. He was key in the overseas program.
- Willens: While you were at the Interior Department, there were repeated statements from Saipan about a desire to reintegrate with Guam. There were political leaders there in the Popular Party? Do you remember that?
- Taitano: Yes, I remember that. And this is where my loyalty was really challenged. But I think I was a bureaucrat enough to work out a compromise, if you can call it a compromise. So, at the request of the State Department, I wrote a letter to then-Congressman Ricky Bordallo, saying go easy on it, please, because we are having a problem with the United Nations charging us with annexation. Saipan was outside the American possessions. But in return I got the State Department to help me get the appropriations. They worked with the Foreign Affairs Committee to sell them the program.
- Willens: Was Bordallo a
- Taitano: At that time he was sponsoring a resolution in the Guam Legislature.
- Willens: The Guam Legislature, to stimulate integration?
- Taitano: Integration.
- Willens: And there were political leaders over in Saipan like Ben Santos, Felipe Salas and others doing the same thing.
- Taitano: Well, subsequently, after I got out of Interior, I became a member of the integrated committee.
- Willens: Were you a member of the Reunification Committee?
- Taitano: Yes.

- Willens: Why do you think that ultimately failed in the late 1960s when the Guamanians voted against the idea?
- Taitano: Well, frankly speaking, it's a matter of economics. The Popular Party [in Guam] was advocating integration. The Territorial Party, controlled by the Chamber of Commerce, was saying, well, if we do, we're going to have to pay the bill. Saipan was then lower economically [than Guam] and if we put them together we have to subsidize part of the operation. Well, the voters accepted that, and voted no.
- Willens: When you left the Interior Department, did you come back to Guam?
- Taitano: No, I went to Saipan first. I was asked to be there when Deputy High Commissioner Benitez resigned. He was called a "Stormy Petrel" by the High Commissioner.
- Willens: He was well-regarded over there.
- Taitano: Anyway, when he resigned, I was there. I received more than 50 applications for his job, all sponsored by Senators. And so my usefulness at Interior is over, Daniel having been removed as Governor. And I really was smart enough to realize that because I didn't get the job out of politics, and in addition, I had a run-in with Vice President Johnson. He told me he doesn't forget.
- Willens: Was the run-in, did it have to do with Micronesia or Guam?
- Taitano: No, it has to do with appointing a Mexican to be a judge in Samoa. I appointed a judge, a Mexican, at the recommendation of Senator Yarborough, one of the biggest political enemies of the Johnson-Connally group, and Congressman Gonzales, without clearing with the state organization in Texas.
- Willens: I see.
- Taitano: 6:30 in the morning, Saturday morning, I got a phone call, and I got hell from Vice President Johnson for doing it without consulting with him or the state delegation.
- Willens: So you knew your days in the Interior were numbered.
- Taitano: And then Kennedy was assassinated. In fact, I knew that the minute Bill Daniel was out of Guam that I would be going home.
- Willens: What was your job in Saipan?
- Taitano: Deputy High Commissioner.
- Willens: And how many years were you there?
- Taitano: I was supposed to be there for 60 days and stayed there for 30 months.
- Willens: Thirty months.
- Taitano: They asked me to go there until Interior could decide which senatorial recommendation they were going to follow.
- Willens: Now, during the months that you were in Saipan, in the Trust Territory Administration, what did you think their attitudes were toward future political status? Were they still opposed to any change in the status?
- Taitano: No. When I was there, they were for actually giving autonomy to the different districts within an overall nation.
- Willens: The Congress of Micronesia was created while you were there. Did you think that was an important action?

- Taitano: Yes, I think so.
- Willens: That was a step toward a unified Micronesia?
- Taitano: At that time, one of my pet theories, as far as Micronesia is concerned, is that they should combine with Guam and set up a Republic of Micronesia.
- Willens: And ultimately look toward statehood.
- Taitano: Right. Well, statehood or independence. But, in fact, at that time I was sort of sold by the idea of letting one elect its own governor. I said first we should have the Northern Marianas and Guam administratively combined so that eventually when they elect their own governors it would be governor of the Marianas, rather than governor of Guam. I said once you permit one jurisdiction to elect self-government, that's it. Nobody is going to say get rid of my governor so I can elect one other governor. But, of course, you see the problem there is dealing with the United Nations. Though they permitted Australia to administratively combine Papua and New Guinea, by that time the colonization committee was wary about any U.S. administrative union. So that idea of mine was brushed aside as un-United Nations.
- Willens: One of the issues that we're investigating is the extent to which the United States policy was one of fragmentation, of divide and conquer, in terms of opening up separate negotiations with the Marianas and then ultimately the districts went their different ways, as you know. But based on your experience, do you think that there would have been a way to keep all the districts in Micronesia together?
- Taitano: Oh, yes, that could have been done.
- Willens: You think it could have been done, based on your experience in the 1960s?
- Taitano: Oh, yes. It could have been done.
- Willens: But subsequently, issues developed about revenue sharing. The richer districts, like the Northern Marianas and the Marshalls and Palau, didn't want to share revenues with the poorer districts. Others emphasized cultural and linguistic differences. But your sense was that there was a possibly a way to keep them together.
- Taitano: Oh, yes, it was possible. These language differences and economic differences—those could have all been ironed out given a proper length of time to work them out. One of the problems was they were being pressed by the United Nations to do something about people governing themselves. So the first step they took was the Congress of Micronesia. I was there. I had a lot of fun with it.
- Willens: With the Congress of Micronesia?
- Taitano: Yes. Before it was set up. The High Commissioner left Saipan to go to Washington to consult with Interior about the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: About the Secretarial Order?
- Taitano: Yes, and they left me there. And whenever the High Commissioner was out, I would be the one in charge. One morning I got a call from the Mayor of Saipan. He said, "Please come down and help me." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "Just come down." Okay, I'll be down there. When I came down to his office, about 100 ladies, only women, were waiting. He said these ladies want to go out there and lie in the air field to keep the High Commissioner from landing.
- Willens: They didn't like the High Commissioner.

- Taitano: No, they didn't like him because we wanted a Congress of Micronesia, and Saipan wanted to join to Guam.
- Willens: So there was a lot of opposition on Saipan to creating the Congress of Micronesia. Did the ladies go out to the airport?
- Taitano: No, I talked to them and I said, please, please, please. This will not be a reflection on Goding. This will be a reflection on me. I'm the one here, not Goding. I will have to answer for what you do. So they decided not to go.
- Willens: I heard that the women's organization in the Popular Party was very powerful.
- Taitano: Oh, yes, definitely.
- Willens: There was an effort back in the Interior Department and State to move forward on political status so there was a proposal to have a plebiscite as early as 1967-1968? Do you remember hearing anything about an idea of moving that rapidly to develop some new political status for all of Micronesia?
- Taitano: Let me give you what I told them when they asked me about the wisdom of having the early plebiscite. It depends on what you guys want. Do you want Micronesia to leave us, or do you want Micronesia to stay with us—the United States. I mean, do you want a straw vote that they want to stay with us—a plebiscite now before they know too much?
- Willens: If there had been a vote in 1967 or 1968, there would have been overwhelming support for joining the United States, like Guam.
- Taitano: Oh, tremendous. Correct.
- Willens: Now, why was it that there was not an early plebiscite?
- Taitano: Because the United Nations has said they're not ready yet for a plebiscite. They make this mission every year, wasn't it?
- Willens: You think that influenced the Interior and State not to hold the plebiscite? Just think about it for a moment, in view of what's happened. If there had been a vote in 1967 or 1968 and they joined the United States, then subsequently they became more educated and politically sophisticated. Would it have lasted?
- Taitano: No.
- Willens: It wouldn't have lasted. They would have spun off to go their different ways.
- Taitano: Correct.
- Willens: So it turned out to be wise policy.
- Taitano: But, you know, one of the funny recommendations at that point was say, listen, if you want to make them American, then prohibit the importation of Japanese products. Make everything American—your cars, your refrigerators, they want to repair, go to buy replacement, they go American. Now, you may think that's funny but that can accomplish a lot. For awhile here in Guam, to own a Japanese car is almost a disgrace.
- Willens: The Congress of Micronesia in 1967 and 1968 took the initiative by creating its own Future Status Commission, and they issued a report that recommended free association or independence. Did you know some of the people involved in that like Dr. Palacios and others?
- Taitano: Yes, I know Dr. Palacios, and Olympio Borja.
- Willens: Are you familiar with their recommendations?

- Taitano: No, at this point in time I forgot. That's a long time ago.
- Willens: It is a long time ago.
- Taitano: And when I left the Trust Territory, I just slowly brushed their problems away from my mind and I concentrated on Guam.
- Willens: Did you come back to Guam then?
- Taitano: Yes.
- Willens: And did you begin your political career here then? When did you first run for the Guamanian Legislature?
- Taitano: 1966.
- Willens: 1966? Right after you came back.
- Taitano: The following September, I elected February the 1st [as my departure date], and the department just got angry with me in Interior because I got tired of waiting.
- Willens: Waiting for what?
- Taitano: For my replacement in Saipan. I had my family here in Guam, and I was all by myself in Saipan. I had to go back and forth, and they wouldn't promise me a job for any definite period of time. Of course, they couldn't. But even under the Democratic Administration, they still won't say, this is your job until the change of Administration. And I have to be concerned about my family and myself in the long run. I can't stay there in limbo. So finally Mrs. Van Cleve and I agreed on a certain date.
- Willens: She was then the Director of your office.
- Taitano: There's a history of how she became Director, too, if you're interested in history. But then we agreed on a certain date. That date came. They said, yes, provided the Secretary will notify you. I didn't wait. That date came; I just came back to Guam and I sent a cablegram back, I'm on Guam. Boy, they were so angry with me they even deprived me of any possible federal retirement benefits.
- Willens: For the years that you had served in the government?
- Taitano: Yes. You see, at that time, once you put in ten years, then you can have what they call it, deferred retirement, until I reach a certain age and then I can draw some benefits. When I left there, I made arrangements with the Personnel Office and the High Commissioner that 60 days I will go and leave. That will make up my ten years service. When the decision came, no leave, I was just out. So, I lost all my federal credit.
- Willens: What is the story as to how Mrs. Van Cleve became head of the office?
- Taitano: You don't want to know that.
- Willens: Yes. Actually, I know her, but I haven't interviewed her yet. She said she would be available for an interview.
- Taitano: Then you take her side. My side is prejudiced.
- Willens: Well, we all stand by our own point of view. And that's one reason for these interviews.
- Taitano: No, no, I will be patting my back too much if I told you.
- Willens: You recommended her.

- Taitano: No, I didn't recommend her. Because that really, you know, that pertains to a lot of people. There was a whole big fight.
- Willens: Was there a big fight?
- Taitano: This was when they drew politics and they tried to upgrade the position to assistant secretary.
- Willens: Yes.
- Taitano: That's how they started this assistant secretary.
- Willens: Yes, it was subsequently done in later administrations.
- Taitano: It started at that time and we were struggling. Actually, the Johnson Administration came in and they wanted women.
- Willens: That's perfectly understandable.
- Willens: Well, then, many years later Secretary Hickel came out to Saipan in 1969 and said that the United States wants the Trust Territory to be part of the United States. And that was viewed as a very important declaration. Did you have any views about the Northern Marianas negotiations as they were underway? Did you meet with the members of the Marianas Political Status Commission or any of that group?
- Taitano: No. I totally cut myself off after I left Saipan.
- Willens: Did you grow up in Guam?
- Taitano: Yes. I was born here in Guam. I lived here in Guam. I went to elementary school here in Guam.
- Willens: Elementary school and high school here? And then you went to University of Pennsylvania?
- Taitano: No, I went to a small college in Kentucky, Berea College. It's a wonderful college. College for the poor people. No tuition. But we had to work.
- Willens: And then to Wharton?
- Taitano: And then to Wharton School. I spent 12 months there—not in the business or commercial side but on the governmental side. They had an institute set up with the Wharton School called the Institute of State and Local Government, financed only by one person, Simon Felds, the Philadelphia millionaire. Well, when he died, the Institute became independent of Wharton School because he gave the Institute his estate in Philadelphia. That's where the Institute is now, where his home was. I had 12 months training there.
- Willens: So that was in
- Taitano: 1950.
- Siemer: How did you learn about Berea College?
- Taitano: During the war, toward the end of the war, the owner of the Louisville Courier Journal Byron Bingham—he was an Ambassador to France or something.
- Willens: I think so, yes.
- Taitano: He was appointed by Truman to be Ambassador to France. He was out here as part of Admiral Nimitz' group. I don't know, I think he was out here as a correspondent, a war correspondent or something. Anyway, when he was here he got acquainted with Mrs. Johnson, my high school principal. And he offered two scholarships for Guam,

for Berea, to go to Berea. Of course it's tuition free, so the scholarship is for one year's annual expenses, room and board. When that was let out to the public—remember, I was 26 years old at the time, I was too old to go to college. But when that was let out, the Catholic priests in Guam discouraged Catholic students from applying because of the fact that the college requires every student to take two years of Bible, two semesters of Bible. It's non-denominational. So the only people who would be willing to go are the non-Catholics, and I happened to be a Baptist. So Mrs. Johnson approached me and they sent two Baptists. So that's how I got there.

Siemer: What was your major field of study?

Taitano: History and political science, minor in business administration and economics. Then from there on, I applied for a scholarship in the Wharton School, Institute of State and Local Government. Eighteen spots, the Institute would allow only 18 students.

Willens: Eighteen students?

Taitano: Every year they could only pick up 18 students to take the program. It's called the salt mines of graduate school. I got one out of the 18, not because of my scholarship achievement, but because I came from Guam. I suppose they just want to know, want to see how a Samoan looks like, and in addition they want I suppose the university's records [to show] that they have somebody from Guam. I am sure that it wasn't because of my achievement in college. So I got one of the spots there. The program was 7 to 12. The first five hours in the day I had to work in a government office. The main training there is to be a city manager, really. That's what I meant by bureaucrat. And starting at 1:30, we'll have our classes up to 6:30 (5:30 and some days 6:30). And two nights a week up to 10:30, when we had visiting bureaucrats come to lecture with us. And that's for 12 months. After 12 months, then we had to go out and take up 18 months of internship with some government agency, with the proviso that we are not to be paid any amount except the lowest. Actually that is so we can move freely about in the government to learn as much as possible about the field that we're interested in. And I selected at that time, believe it or not, I selected to specialize in real estate tax assessment.

Willens: That's a specialized field. What drove you to that choice?

Taitano: Well, financing the government of Guam is one of the problems that I saw there.

Willens: Did you always think that you'd come back then to Guam and work in the government?

Taitano: Oh, yes, definitely. That's why I left, so that I could come back and work with the government.

Willens: And so you were active in Guamanian politics for 20-25 years?

Taitano: No, no, no. Twelve years.

Willens: Twelve years. From 1966?

Taitano: From 1966 to 1980. I left two years out. I ran for Lieutenant Governor, lost, then that two years [was a] void in the middle of a career. But they knew that I was around.

Willens: All right. Well, thank you very much, sir. I think this will help immensely.

Taitano: I hope. Well, if anything pops up in your mind later that you have unanswered, just give me a buzz. You have my telephone number.

Willens: Okay. That's a deal. Thank you.