This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

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LISTENING TO INDIANS

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MEL TONASKET, Okanagon
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Sam Myers:

Today I'm talking to Mel Tonasket. Mel, is that name from any particular tribal background?

Mel Tonasket:

It's been changed a little bit, made it easier for the whites to say it. It is from my tribe though. I'm really an Okanagon from the Northwest. My reservation is a confederation of 11 small tribes or bands, and it's called the Colville Confederated Tribes, and my particular band in that is the Okanagon.

SM: Were you born and raised there in that part of the country?

MT: I was born at the Public Health Service hospital on the reservation where our tribal office is now. I was raised there. I grew up in the woods. I grew up in the mountains until I was seven and I had to start school.

SM: Most of us have the impression of eastern Washington as being a big prairie-like area.

MT: I'm a mountain person. This flat country down here is really strange to me.

SM: Really? Just what part of eastern Washington is mountainous?

MT: Well, there's a lot of mountains that goes through there. Of course the Cascades is just to the west of us. As a matter of fact, at one time our reservation ran to the middle of the Cascadian range up to Canada, but that only lasted about a year, and they found minerals and they took that away from us, but we got a pretty good mountain range within our existing reservation, which is 1,300,000 acres.
SM: What range is that?

MT: My range, I guess.

SM: That's as good as any. And you went to school there too?

MT: I started school in a parochial school in the town where I presently live called Omak. Then that was so racist and bigotted and terrible that when we moved away in the third grade I said I'd never come back.

SM: To that school?

MT: To that town, to that community. I guess it's a typical reservation or near reservation white community where Indians just weren't considered. They weren't employed, they were kinda ridiculed. I couldn't understand it when I was a little kid, and I still have a hard time understanding it now, but I grew up mostly in construction towns. My dad worked in construction, all over, building dams. I moved around quite a lot. I graduated from high school at Grand Coulee Dam, right where the dam is built, and that's my Alma Mater. It's on the Columbia River.

SM: Did you go to school after high school?

MT: Just of hard knocks.

SM: The school of hard knocks?

MT: Yeah. I went in the Service right out of high school, was in the security group in the Navy, and went to work for the Bureau when I come out of there. See, I wanted to work with people, particularly my people, and so I thought the Bureau would be how I could help my own people. All that opened my eyes, that's what guided me into this sort of work that I'm doing now, politics.
SM: So what you're doing now is working in politics?

MT: Yeah, I'm a tribal councilman now. I've been on my tribal council for seven years.

SM: Now the tribal council, will you identify that again?

MT: Colville Confederated Tribes. I'm on the business council; I'm the vice-chairman of our tribal government.

SM: So you have a lot of contact with other political people?

MT: Oh yeah. Yeah. I started out seven years ago dealing with the state. The tribal governing body kind of assigned me to Olympia, which is our state capital, to keep up with some of the legislation that was going on through there, plus, a couple years after that they started making me work in the national level, and I've been at the national involvement ever since, and from that it kind of pushed me into the National Congress of American Indians, which I'm the president of now.

SM: The National Congress of American Indians. That's the oldest and largest of the Indian organizations?

MT: Yes. Yes, we just started our 32nd year.

SM: Does this keep you travelling a lot?

MT: Almost way too much. See, I'm still on my own tribal council, and with that, and NCAI, the National Congress of American Indians, it keeps me on the road. Maybe I get home about a week altogether out of a month.

SM: Do you have a family back home?
MT: Yeah. I got a family. Three sons, been married 17 years.

SM: What town do they live in now?

MT: Omak. See, when I decided I was gonna get into this line of work . . . I worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs . . . I seen how the Bureau was really ripping and tearing at our people. Our tribe was the next in line to be terminated after the Klamath Tribe, and so the superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and all of his department heads moved from Klamath after they terminated them, up to Colville, and we were next on the list. And our council was a majority terminationalist council, and so through the six years that I worked for the Bureau, I worked in what is called the Individual Indian Money Department, writing the checks, keeping track of all of the accounts for land sales, leases, and so on, and so I seen how the Bureau of Indian Affairs forced our land to be taken out of trust. I seen how they forced our elders to sell their allotments, take their land out of trust, get a fee patent on it, and sell it to qualify for state welfare. I seen them do all kinds of crooked things like that, where they would use a straw man, somebody, an Indian, to buy land for a white man, so it could be taken out of trust. I seen 'em work hand in hand with the Bureau of Reclamation and the states and places—what it was doing, it was just checkerboarding our reservation.

SM: I've heard the same term from other people.

MT: I seen how it was done, and of course, it kinda ate at my guts, because I knew that that didn't have to be that way, and so when I was telling my people when they'd come in, "You don't have to do that, here's other ways you can do it," so I got caught.

SM: You got caught as a BIA employee?

MT: Right. The superintendent of the agency called me in and kinda give
me the word that you realize where your paycheck is coming from, and who you work for, and who you're responsible to, and you can't do this to your employer. So I told them to shove their job, and I quit.
That's when I decided I'd get involved. I didn't know it'd be politics.

SM: How long ago was this now?

MT: Eight years ago. And I figured the best place to get involved, to get into the battle would be where I thought would be the worst place to live, so I moved back to Omak.

SM: And so that's where the family is now?

MT: Yeah. I've been there ever since.

SM: And you have been working as a tribal representative?

MT: No, the first year I moved back to Omak, it was in 1968, I started challenging the city fathers, the schools, the churches, the police departments, chamber of commerce, "What are you doin' to my people?"

SM: But you weren't working for anyone now? You were on your own?

MT: No. I qualified for welfare for a couple of years. If it wasn't for the fact that I could hunt and fish year 'round and pick berries, we wouldn't have ate, because I just wouldn't take welfare.

SM: You qualified, but you wouldn't take it?

MT: No sir. I seen what they done to my people, and I wouldn't have nothin' to do with them. Well, the elders from my area asked me to run for the council, and I said, "No." I thought I was too young. I thought I was too dumb, and so I didn't, but the thing interested me, so then, in '68, after they asked me, I joined the NCAI, I joined a
regional organization called the Northwest Affiliated Tribes, that is, the tribes of Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Washington, to learn; to see what Indians do, you know, who is who, and how do they get things done. So the following year, then, I accepted their offer to run, and I've been involved ever since.

SM: As a tribal representative now, in the state capital at Olympia. In addition to that, other places?

MT: Yeah. I used to spend a lot of time in Olympia.

SM: Now this year, of course, as president of the association you're travelling the whole nation, aren't you?

MT: Well, I have been for the last three years. I'm on my second term as president of the NCAI.

SM: Did you know Leon Cook?

MT: Yeah, he was my predecessor. One time my area, the Northwest, wanted me to run for a national office. They ran me as Lee's first vice-president, in Sarasota, Florida, and I was stuck in the resolutions committee. As a matter of fact, I still haven't seen a full convention, I've always been in committees, and I've been with the organization seven years. But anyway, I ran as Lee's partner once, and I lost it, I think, by two tribes never showed up to vote, and that's what cost me the election.

SM: I'm sorry that we're interfering with your seeing this conference today, but I hope this is helpful to the project of informing people generally.

MT: Well, if this tape is goin' to students, I think it's more important
that I talk here than to go listen to somebody else talk, because, see, I never went to school. I mean, I barely made it through high school. I wasn't interested in history; I couldn't understand what they was tryin' to teach me in English; I thought history--both state and U.S. History--was lying to me; I was the only Indian in my school when I was in high school, and the value systems that they were teaching were so different from what I'd been brought up with, and I kinda felt like an outcast. But I think it's important to tell students particularly today that they have to put up with it.

SM: Both Indian and white kids and all the other groups.

MT: Sure. That our whole future relies on their involvement and their putting a priority on being involved, and I know that I guess I've been considered as being successful, being a non-college graduate to lead a national Indian organization, and to even be considered for the position of assistant secretary for Indian affairs is hard for me to comprehend. And I think that really all it takes is a lot of hard work and commitment--not to be successful or to be a politician, but to work and produce, and there is a big lacking of that, I think, and that's why I just want to try to spark somebody to think about it.

SM: Well, let's dedicate the rest of this tape to as much of that kind of information as you feel like you'd like to get across to the other young people in the country, because you're still a young person yourself, you know.

MT: Well, I aged about ten years in this three years.

SM: And you're also achieving some fame too. Yesterday when you were on the program here, people liked it, and you seem very much in demand, which is a nice reaction.
MT: I guess I credit it to just being very open about everything.

SM: You're candid. You say what you think, don't you?

MT: What I think and what I see and what I think that I know. I think that the more people know honestly is happening, the more some of the negative things will be corrected. Besides, I think that I'm really . . . what's the word, suspicious. I think . . . well, I've seen Indian leaders be set up. I've seen tribal governments be set up and manipulated, and that's particularly easy to do that with people who hide behind closed doors, or they're not really public about their actions and their feelings, and so I make it a special point, I always have. There's no way that I'm gonna get caught doin' nothin', because everybody's gonna know and see what I'm doin' and what I think, and if they don't like what I think, then I don't have to be a leader--I can always go home and be what I was.

SM: It would be interesting if all of our political people could say that. Mel, I suppose you're familiar with the Menominee termination proceedings, how they got restoration accomplished. But it didn't quite happen to you. Your tribe wasn't quite terminated, they were just beginning to get to it?

MT: Yeah. There was six termination bills submitted for our termination.

SM: For your tribe?

MT: Yes. And that was another one of the reasons that I ran for the council. The elders asked me to run because I was opposed to termination, and so the first year that I got on the tribal council we ran as a ticket, a whole party.

SM: Back in the early '60's?
MT: In '68 or '69. Anyway, we ran as a team. Our reservation is divided up into four districts. The district that I come from, called the Omak District, has four councilmen, and our council, half of 'em are elected every year; it's rotating, so you never lose 'em all at one shot, and so the first year I ran and I won, we broke the majority rule of the terminationists council, and it was 50-50, and so we knew a little bit about white man politics, and the chairman of the council can't vote, only in case of a tie, so we give them the chairmanship, so then we had majority vote on the floor, and then we wouldn't allow . . . we just controlled, kept things at bay, anyway, and we didn't process any more termination actions, and the second year we beat 'em even more, and really got the majority in.

SM: So the people did have something to say about the termination thing.

MT: They didn't at the start, but after we got in they did. See, the council's made up of 14 members, there was only two of 'em on the council who were opposed to termination through about six years there--just done this without referendum votes of the people or anything. They give our law and order away without a referendum, vote of the people. They done all kinds of, I think, crooked things, evil things, and so, when we got back on, we started holding district meetings with the people, and letting them have their say on what sort of actions we were going to take. We ran on a ticket that opposed termination, and on a ticket of developing our natural resources and our human resources, and that's what we've been doing.

SM: Then you finally accomplished the prevention of termination?

MT: It's a moot issue at home.

SM: It isn't being threatened any longer, is it?

MT: No. Not flat out termination. Not from our own people. Our people
have been brought together. The fear that we see is subtle termination coming from the federal government.

SM: In different ways, not this overt termination that was proposed in the '50's?

MT: Right. We don't see no bill coming out that will just openly terminate the Colvilles.

SM: Are there any particular things that might essentially be like termination, even though not called that?

MT: Yeah. I'll use water for an example—really what I consider and what a lot of people consider the blood of the body, and without water then your reservation is worthless. God knows that the Southwestern tribes know that better than anybody, so there's been substantial law stemming from what was called the "Winter's Case," just after the turn of the century, that said that all tribes have the paramount rights to the use of all waters that flow through boundary, originate and underly Indian reservations, not only for now, but for future use. And you know that means the first right to the use of water; that cities, states, anybody else, white farmers, are second, third, fourth priority to the water. And there's no law that says tribes don't have the right to regulate, to control, to issue permits, to have their own codes, ordinances over the use of the water, setting their own priorities for the use of water. But in the past the states have issued water permits on Indian reservations, and have allowed municipalities and non-Indian ranchers, cattlemen and industries to use our water without our permission. To me, when the federal government, or a trustee, allows something like that to happen, that's a subtle termination.

SM: In other words, if carried far enough, it would essentially terminate the tribal system?
MT: There's no use us being on the land if we don't have the water to do anything with it.

SM: I see what you mean.

MT: That's one way. Another way--I don't think is as drastic, unless your expertise is in education, but for a while there, when education dollars would come out for Indian programs, Johnson-O'Malley, for example, that money would route through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and then the Bureau of Indian Affairs in our particular instance, our area office in Portland, they would then route the Johnson-O'Malley money through the state of Washington, and then the state would decide who gets Johnson-O'Malley and who don't. The state would decide how much each of the programs would get, and who wouldn't, and so it was under state control, and to us, that's a subtle termination, because our relationship through treaties and agreements is with the feds, not with the state.

SM: Do you feel that you have a better chance, that you get along better with the federal government than the state governments?

MT: Yes. It's always been that way. And there's no doubt that it's gonna continue to be that way. States are really in a direct conflict of interest with us.

SM: Is it the state being a competitor for government funds, for example?

MT: I think mostly, yeah, but I think the most serious part is they're a competitor for the natural resources that we've got.

SM: The water and the fish?

MT: Land, taxes.
SM: Can you give us some enlightenment on the fishing problem up there? I imagine even though you're from eastern Washington, you're still familiar with the fishing problems along the coast and the rivers, aren't you?

MT: A little bit.

SM: Well, for example, you know the Judge Boldt Decision, it's famous now, and the decision was that half the salmon catch is to go to the Indian people and half to the non-Indian. Right?

MT: Right.

SM: There's one thing that I never did get clear--the buy-back of boats. Can you explain that for us?

MT: The buy-back of boats?

SM: We keep hearing about the buy-back of these boats, and I guess it's where people have gone out of the business because of their loss of the rights, and they put their boats for sale, and then the state bought up the boats?

MT: You're talking from the non-Indian point of view?

SM: Well, the whole thing, whatever happened.

MT: I don't know of any non-Indians that have went out of business, for one thing. Even though Judge Boldt ruled that the tribes get 50% of of the fish run according to treaty, and that isn't saying something new, that's just clarifying an existing law, so it's not giving something. See, the tribes used to get less than 1%, I think, of the total fish run. They're still lucky to get 10% of the fish run today, even though.
SM: Why is that?

MT: They don't have the facilities. They don't have the boats, nor the equipment to go out and get the 50% of the fish run. Because they have the right to doesn't mean that within one year they're geared up so they can go out and get that volume.

SM: I think that's one of the questions. These boats have been picked up and paid for by the state, and then the state auctions them off, and there's been quite a bit of agitation against the idea of allowing Indian fishermen to bid on the boats to go into the business. Is that it?

MT: I never heard of anything like that. There's a lot of rumors that go out that Indians are goin' out, but very few of them percentage-wise are getting new boats, and most of their new boats they're getting from EDA grants, special federal grants to go buy new boats, tribes have been fairly successful at starting. See, a lot of the tribes, a lot of the Indian fishermen had a lot of their boats, nets, gear, confiscated by the state, prior to the Boldt decision. And so the state, when they would confiscate Indian gear, they'd sell it right away.

SM: To anyone?

MT: Yeah. They'd just put it out for auction. They do the same thing when we was in the cigarette tax war, cigarette war, same thing. They'd sell 'em right away, and give 'em away, as cigarettes go, and so there isn't, I just really haven't seen--and I deal with the fishermen tribes a whole lot, you know. I was just over there last week, as a matter of fact, and was talking about fisheries. I don't think I've heard anything about them buying non-Indian boats and equipment. They buy brand new things, just because it's hard to
get federal dollars to buy somethin' used, and it's easier to buy--I don't know how the feds think all the time--but it's easier to get federal dollars to go out and buy something big and brand new.

SM: Because that's an established price, whereas the used things might be the wrong price? Well, I get The Indian Voice from STOWW, you know, the Small Tribes of Western Washington, and in almost every issue there's something about the boat buy-back problem and the controversy over it, so I don't know exactly what it's all about. Anyway, it still is a big problem, and the Indians still are not getting 50% of the catch, even though, according to the decision, they're supposed to?

MT: They don't have the facilities; they don't have the equipment to take 50% of the fish.

SM: A lot of the Indian tribes are now running fish farms or spawning beds?

MT: Aquaculture.

SM: This is working pretty well?

MT: Really well. Yeah. I think they're really leading the country in aquaculture development; developing special salmon breeds, and oysters mostly. They've really been successful in oysters. They're startin' to develop markets internationally.

SM: That could be a great industry, couldn't it?

MT: It is. Well, it's in the process of being developed. It takes a lot of money and time and training for the Indians to do that. They've been at it, I guess, about seven or eight years, started about then. Of course the Bureau told them, the feds told the tribes, it was impossible when they first started it, but they knew that the
Hawaiian natives used to have their aquaculture programs, and Waikiki was one of the places. Pearl Harbor Bay was another one where there was seven aquaculture developments, and they grew their own seafood, so they've done it and it has been successful, and they're really proud of it, and I'm proud of them for going on with it.

SM: Sounds like a great idea. Besides, who knows, it may provide more seafood for all of us, and that'll be a great thing.

MT: They're also developing uses of by-products. Where it used to be just a waste, now that they've been able to convert things to fertilizers and dog foods and things that they couldn't take advantage of before.

SM: What was just wasted before. Have you any comments you'd like to make about the timber business in your state?

MT: It is sure rough. My tribe, about 98% of our income comes from sale of timber, from stumpage. We have a gross sustained yield program of 120,000,000 board feet a year, but we're caught up in a situation where we don't have much competition for our market. See, we don't have our own mills, we don't have our own factories, so we sell to Boise Cascade, just the logs, Crown Zellerbach. Now the market has really been tough.

SM: The demand is terrific, isn't it?

MT: Yeah. But we haven't been able to sell our maximum quota for a long time. We sell less trees and get more money than we ever have. It's really strange. I don't understand the marketing system very well.

SM: I saw Japanese boats in the Columbia River loading logs on to take them all the way to Japan. Could that be some of your logs?
MT: No, most of those are coming from the coast. I was part of a tribal delegation that went back to Washington to the Japanese embassy to talk about the possibility of that. It would take at least three reservations our size, with our timber production, to even interest the Japanese. That's how big of a volume--besides they're really cold-hearted business men. I think it's easier to deal with Crown Z. and Boise Cascade than to deal with the Japanese.

SM: Is that right?

MT: I don't think that we're professional enough yet. That's my personal opinion. But the market's there, internationally.

SM: And it's growing, isn't it?

MT: Yeah. I think our problem in the timber program is really with the federal government, particularly with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Like our reservation, a million acres of our reservation, a million acres of our reservation is prime timber land. Beautiful timber--better than the Coast because ours takes longer, it's a harder wood, finer grained.

SM: What kind of trees are they?

MT: We have ponderosa pine, white pine, tamarack.

SM: They don't have those on the Coast?

MT: No. They got stuff that grows really fast and really big, but it isn't as good a species as ours. We've been in the timber business for a long time. Our reservation celebrated its 100th birthday as a reservation three years ago, and not once until just recently has there been a reforestation program--thinning, replanting, anything. It's always been just take away, take away, take away. I think
there's only been one really full timber inventory, and that's outdated. In all of the time we've been in the timber selling business, the United States government has been taking off the top, off of our gross income, 10% for administrative fees they called it, and for years and years and years, that 10% would go back into the Treasury and God knows where it went.

SM: You mean 10% of the timber income?

MT: Our total timber income. So if we sold $7,000,000 worth of timber, they took 10% off the gross, and we lost it, and that was supposedly for their management, for administration of our timber program.

SM: Did they plant any trees?

MT: Not nothin'!

SM: Did the tribe ever plant trees?

MT: We didn't have the money for it then. So what has happened, though, is that a few years ago after we got control of the council, we started really organizing ourselves, bringing in resource people to help us, and we brought in some legal counsel and things. The lady who is the chairman of our council now, her name is Lucy Covington, is really my teacher in Washington, D.C. situations. She's really a top-flight person to handle Washington. She really worked hard, and she got the Department of Interior to agree that, instead of taking the 10% back to the Treasury, they'd reinvest the 10% on the reservation, in our forest. So we're getting the 10% back, and this is only within the last two years, and we started timber-thinning programs and replanting and better management programs, but the Bureau would never do that, our trustee never did do that.

SM: One of your own people had to push it through?
MT: One of our own. We had to do it, and I really object to it. I mean, that's what I think the trustee is supposed to have been doing is protecting our resources and making it better for us, so that maybe some day that we won't have to rely on federal dollars for health, for education and so on. We can be more economically independent. Now even today, other reservations who might not have the relationship and the control of their Bureau of Indian Affairs agency like we have of ours, what's happening to their 10 percent? I don't know if they're receiving it back or not. Maybe we're an exception, I don't know. I think it's a question that should be answered, and that we all should be treated equal on the situation. The other thing is the whole Bureau philosophy--their value of success in their forestry department is to see how many trees they can sell, how many timber sales can they let, how many contracts, and not a thought of what are you giving up for what you are making.

SM: For the future?

MT: Yeah, and there's still that philosophy. They're good paper pushers, but that's really where our trouble has been, more than anything.

SM: You do have a tree planting, tree culture program started in the last couple of years?

MT: Now, yes.

SM: In the National Congress of American Indians, as president, are you looking at all these other tribes, and how their resources are being used too? Do you work on those projects, lobby for those things, and so on?

MT: When we're requested to.
SM: By those people?

MT: By the individual tribes.

SM: In other words you don't go in there and say, "Hey, you gotta do this?"

MT: No. We only go into other Indian country on their invitation, and we only assist them in areas that they invite us to assist. We have been really involved with water rights.

SM: Water rights is one of the big things right now for the NCAI?

MT: That and energy resources. There's a lot of tribes that have a lot of energy potential untapped--coal, oil, oil shale, natural gas, nuclear, hydro, geo-thermal. I think that if a person would put it all on a map where the energy belt is from Alaska on down, the majority, at least half of it is in Indian, native American property, that is untapped.

SM: I've heard there is a 500 years supply of coal, for example.

MT: Right. And it's really gonna be one big battle. It's already starting to brew. I know that the feds in the past have kinda taken it for granted that they can control, they can make the leases, maybe the Indians will get a small royalty, but now the tribes are starting to know what their rights are, their ownership.

SM: They don't have to use it if they don't want to, do they?

MT: No. And that's where a lot of the big conflict is coming. If you heard me talk about Peter MacDonald yesterday, that's the same sort of a situation. You'll see it happen, I think, on the Crow Reservation.

SM: Now the Crows are against mining the coal?
MT: No, they're not against it.

SM: They're for it. The Cheyennes and the Crow would have opposing opinions, I guess?

MT: They're fighting the contracts. They're fighting the leases. See, because the feds negotiated their leases for them at, like $7.50 a ton royalty for their coal, and that's extremely cheap. If you look out on the open market, an individual that is negotiating a lease with Peabody Coal gets a lot more than $7.50 a ton, and so they want to review it, and they want more control of the coal development on the reservation. They don't want just a big, jagged, open pit.

SM: The tribes have the power to do this, don't they?

MT: Yeah. But what comes from that is the kick-back, or the getting kicked, I guess, from the big coal industry, because the more regulations the tribes come on, the higher the royalties, the more it's gonna cost the coal companies, and they don't wanta do that. They want more profit, so they put political pressure on Washington, and you see we're afraid that there might be some sort of legislation that will try to take away, will try to dilute some of the tribal power, the tribal control over those natural resources. I think that I can relate better to water, because we don't have the other things. Our reservation is boundaried by the Columbia River. We've got Grand Coulee Dam on the river, we've got Chief Joseph Dam on the river, and we found, after all these years--how long has Coulee Dam been built--since the 1930's some time, half the dam is on our reservation. We've got a secretarial opinion that our boundary line runs the thread of the Columbia River, that is the boundaries of the reservation.

SM: Up the center?

MT: The Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior never
looked at that; they never condemned or they never bought our part of the bed of the river where they put the dam; so actually the Coulee Dam and Chief Joseph Dam are trespassing on the bed of our river. They took for granted, just like they take every other resource. Part of the purpose of the dam, Coulee Dam, was for reclamation of Colville Indian Reservation, Spokane Indian Reservation, right across from us. Not one drop of water has ever been developed for irrigation, reclamation of either reservation since that dam has been constructed. All of the water, the canal systems, and everything has been off the reservation to the Columbia basin, and made millionaires out of people. All of the power is being delivered out to the coast or out to Spokane, to Kaiser Aluminum and other places. They're using our water, they're trespassing on our land, for outside benefits. Now we got Congress to tell the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Army to work with us, and we're in the process of negotiating a share of the power from the dam, and maybe a share of the revenue, half of 1% or something. O.K., so if we say--I'll just give you an example of something that we might develop that is gonna be needed in the future--nuclear enrichment plan, for example, on the Colville Indian Reservation, behind Coulee Dam, a good site location for it. Nuclear enrichment plant requires a lot of water; requires a lot of energy, electrical energy, almost as much as what the new third powerhouse is producing. So far we haven't received any benefits, so we say, "O.K., this is part of our negotiations. We want this development because it will hire, I don't know, over 350 people, full time, good pay, profits to the tribe, but in turn, we're gonna have to take away some electricity that is being delivered to Kaiser Aluminum, Boeing, or some other big facility."

SM: To use on the reservation?

MT: For our tribe to use. For our own economic development. You can see
the fight and the political pressure that's gonna come down to keep us at the level that we're at. You'll see the same sort of thing in the Southwest, where the tribes are under the gun, under the central Arizona project, which is being held up now for reconsideration, for reevaluation. Those tribes, some of them are packing water now, and the plans for that water is to be routed off reservation development. And those guys are lying to the tribes, saying that, "We promise you certain amounts of gallons of water." And if they would deliver every drop of water that they quantified for use for the different interest groups, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Mexico, California, everybody, there's no water. They'd be pumping sand. And they're flat out lying to the tribes; they're lying to everybody else, including Mexico, that there is enough water, and I think when the tribe tries to implement their Winter doctrine rights--paramount rights to the use of the water--Los Angeles isn't gonna give up their water supply; Imperial Valley isn't gonna give up their water supply; Phoenix isn't gonna give up their water supply, and what it winds up to be is gonna be a wide-out "get the Indians," and the whole thing is very spooky. So forestry is just one small part of it. Energy resources, I think, is going to be one of the biggest fights that Indians are gonna have, because as time goes on and the energy resources are going to be needed more and more, the only untapped places left in this country is mostly Indian reservations, and they're gonna try to take it from us by hook or by crook. There's no evidence to show that it's gonna be any different than it used to be. Like my reservation used to be 5,000,000 acres or more. They found silver, they took 1,500,000 acres. They found gold in another place, they took another 1,500,000 acres. Farm land, they took another 1,500,000 acres.

SM: It's been shrunk time and again?

MT: Now we're down to 1,300,000.
SM: Do you have any hope for correcting some of these things?

MT: The only hope I have is the general population of this country. I have no hope for the legislature, I have no hope for the administration. I'm not saying that the administration is crooked, evil, bad, but it's politics. It's big and it's vicious politics. It's things that they don't teach in college when they teach political science. I mean there's wheeling and dealing, trade-offs and under-the-table things going on, so most of the general population of this country really don't know what's going on, and I think that the more that we can tell the truth of how this government operates, the more that the general population can say, "If they can do that to Indians, and they have treaties, and they have a special department of government supposedly to protect them, what are they doing to my poor white people, where they don't have that other place to go; where they don't have special land ownership, special rights. What are they doing to me? Where's my recourse?" And I think that we should be able to work hand-in-hand, and unless we tell the story, unless there are more of us that are willing to put our necks on the line, nobody's gonna make any corrections. I think that a prime example is Watergate. Watergate isn't something that's brand new, that's never happened before. Things like that has happened with almost every president that's been in office. It's just he got caught. The general population found out about it, and they wouldn't accept it, and I think that if the general population found out how many Indian children are ripped off, really, if they could really get a good picture of what the standard of health is on an Indian reservation, really; if they knew how much the Bureau of Indian Affairs absorbs into administration and overhead out of the total budget that's supposed to be goin' to the Indian programs, their tax dollars, these white folks' tax dollars that are being wasted, they wouldn't put up with that stuff. They'd help us correct some of those problems. I think if they really knew what the economic impact of an Indian reservation is on a state, how much we donate for just our country, up
in the Northwest; what we produce in the revolving dollar. You know when a dollar is made from our business, it increases its value about eight times as it goes through the financial process, and we're into a $10,000,000 a year timber sales program right now. How many jobs does that employ? Where do they buy their food? Where do they pay their electricity bills? Where do they buy their gas? And you put all of those tribes together, if the people knew how much we donate to states, how valuable we are, and if they would help us to get off of welfare, and help us to finish school, we can even donate more to the economy. They wouldn't be fighting us. They wouldn't have the feelings that they've got.

SM: Your real purpose and hope then, is to inform the mass of the people, all of the people, and you still have some confidence that if they do find out what everything is about, that they will react like you said.

MT: I do. I think a large majority of the people are good people.

SM: They want fairness.

MT: They're a little like ostriches; they have their head in the sand until something kicks them in the rear end and says, "Hey, we're here and we're gonna kill you." Then they react, but I know when I see things on television about little kids starving what's happening in Uganda or someplace; I see people suffering, I feel for them, and I imagine an average person throughout the country does, and our Indian people are suffering from a lot of those same things, and there's a lot of misinformation goin' out that your tax dollars are paying me so much a month, and it's wasting money, and it makes all Indians fat and lazy. Well, some of us are kinda obese, you know, but really, very few people like to live on welfare.

SM: It doesn't help really. Well, then, I hope your hopes are realized.
MT: I gotta believe that they are. If I couldn't believe that they are, then I would go home.

SM: So, in other words, it's a bit of optimism that keeps you going in this campaign to inform people.

MT: Yeah, it is.

SM: I hope what we're doing here helps.

MT: I think it does. I think that it's worthwhile even if just one person listens very seriously to the things that I've said, and other people that you've interviewed have said, and gets involved. Maybe one of them will be the President some day, and he'll say, "I remember what he said."

SM: Maybe you will be. You're already in the political scene.

MT: Oh no. I'm goin' home to the reservation where I belong.

SM: Well, Mel, I want to thank you very much for a lot of good information. I appreciate it, and people who hear this will appreciate it.

MT: It's been my pleasure.

SM: Thank you very much.