

Interview with Conrad Jones

Interviewed by Ann Pflaum

Interviewed on July 19, 1999

Conrad Jones - CJ

Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: This is Ann Pflaum. Today is the July 19, 1999. I'm interviewing Conrad Jones.

Conrad, would you explain when you came to the university and what your job has been? Then, we'll go back into more detail. If you will give us an introduction up front...

CJ: I came to the university in 1970. At the time, I worked at what was called the Student Activities Bureau. Lud Spolyer was the director and I was hired as a human relations coordinator. The second job that I had at the university was working under Diane Skomars, who had then become director of the same organization, the Student Activities Bureau. I think we had changed the name to Student Activities Center, but I'm not sure when the name changed. There were about three or four name changes. I'm not clear on the years that they changed. Then, I became director of major events for the Student Activities Bureau. That consisted of working with Greek organizations, with the Campus Carnival, [unclear] its homecoming and, then, working with students of color. I did that probably the [unclear] period of time here at the university.

AP: So, 1979 to 1990?

CJ: Yes. My job has changed and I started working [unclear] student groups, working on policy and various other jobs here at the university, for the Student Activity Center. Then, I became the coordinator around 1976 of the cultural centers, of which there are four.

AP: For the record, could we list them?

CJ: Yes, the Africano Cultural Center, the Chicano Cultural Center, which name has now been changed to LaRaza Cultural Center.

AP: Is that L-a-R-a-z-a?

CJ: Correct. I'm not sure how that's pronounced but that's the correct name spelling—then the Asian-American Cultural Center and the American-Indian Cultural Center.

AP: About when did you assume oversight of those organizations?

CJ: Roughly around 1975 or 1976. I worked with them up till about four years ago. In fact, I wrote the proposal for the cultural centers. At that time, Don Zander and Frank Wilderson, who was then vice-president of Student Affairs, approved of the proposal and they became cultural centers at that particular time.

AP: To pursue that cultural center idea, did you have a model in your mind when you wrote the proposal? Were these common at other institutions or did we break new ground creating them?

CJ: The only one that I knew of—I'm not saying there weren't more because there probably were—at the time was the University of Iowa. That's where I modeled it from.

AP: Has it turned out as well as you expected? They must have because they've lasted a long time.

CJ: Yes, they have. The focus that they had at the time—and still do—was providing programs and information not only for that particular culture but for the university student and population in general. The whole concept was to have a center where that culture could feel comfortable within a setting but also introduce them to the university environment. They would put on programs, have a history month, a history week, that would provide programs for the university community, to provide support services along with MLK [Martin Luther King Program] and other programs that the university had. They are university funded.

AP: What does the funding consist of? Are there paid staff members?

CJ: At the time when I was involved with them, student activities gave \$20,000. That came out of the OSA [Office of Student Affairs] budget, out of Don Zander and Frank Wilderson's office.

AP: So that each one got about \$5,000?

CJ: Each one got \$5,000. That \$5,000 was to put on programs [unclear] staff.

AP: When you say, "staff," that would have been part-time?

CJ: That was student part-time staff. Most of them were work-study. They usually had a director, a secretary, and a program...usually three to four staff people. Probably it came to fifteen hours a week. The rest was volunteers.

AP: As you look back on the programs, is there any particular accomplishment of any of them that you say, gosh! that was just a fabulous thing that happened in such and such a year with one of those program?

CJ: All four provided the community, not the university but the community outside, a vehicle to relate to the university as a whole. Of the students that were involved in the cultural centers, I would

say at least 70 percent of them, were from the community at large. The programs they provided, people from outside the university community came to those events. They were sort of a core to organize other student organizations and some of them still have... For example, in the Asian Cultural Center, there may be ten or twelve different other organizations within the Asian Cultural Center, like the Hmong, Vietnamese student organization. There's about eight or ten other student organizations attached to that. The Africano Cultural Center and the LaRaza and Chicano had other student organizations that were part of the total umbrella, so they were able to provide larger programs that touched on very different nationalities and other cultures, but very were beneficial to the university. They're a place for [unclear] people to get together and discuss what's going on at the university and to support each other in their academics. They study together. They were more of a social program than say the MLK Program or the Learning Resource Center, totally different, two different types of vehicles.

AP: What is the difference between MLK and the Learning Resource Center?

CJ: Martin Luther King, that I know, but I really should not say because I'm not that up-to-date on it. Martin Luther King, I think when they first started, were like a counseling aspect for students of color to utilize. They were sort of broad. They encompassed everyone, not only students of color of students which would come get help, get counseling help, get financial help and personal help. The Learning Resource Centers work on graduate students. They work on everything. The work on counseling, academics, and they're probably more focused on that particular color, like the Africano Learning Resource Center is focused, mainly, with Africano students and the Asian Learning Resource Center is focused, basically, on the Asian students.

AP: So that in addition to the Asian Cultural Center, there is an Asian Learning Resource Center?

CJ: Yes.

AP: Is there a Native-American Learning Resource...?

CJ: Yes, there are four learning resource centers and there are four cultural centers.

AP: So, sort of four-by-four.

CJ: Right. The cultural centers came before the learning resource centers.

AP: You said about 1970?

CJ: I'm saying the cultural centers came about 1976. There were organizations on campus like Chicano, but it wasn't called cultural centers. I can't remember the exact name of them, but they had another name at that particular time, like action councils, and from that they developed into the cultural centers.

AP: I have another question going back to when you first came. Those were heady times. There had been the sit-ins in Morrill Hall and the 1972 demonstration would have occurred two years after you came, so it would have been a very challenging time. What had you done before and how did you find the campus when you came?

CJ: I was director, then, of the Pilot City Employment Office. The staff that I had, like Randy Staten and other people, had done a program for a fellow in the Student Activities Bureau that worked for Lud Spolyer. I'll never forget, we did it in Nicholson Hall, in the auditorium there. It was community-based. They wanted to know what community programs there were, so we came there and did a program on how Pilot City programs were relating to the community and what we were doing to assist the community. So, each staff person said a little bit about what they were doing. Then, there was a question and answer period. I can't think of that fellow's name. I know him real well. I can see his picture right now. He's in Missouri now. He, at that time, said, "You ought to work at the university." I said, "Sounds good." Through him and through Lud Spolyer is the reason why I came to the university, through the program that I put on here as director of the Pilot City Employment Office. I took a job here at the university and that was the first job I took [unclear], as I mentioned before, with Lud Spolyer, the Student Activities director.

AP: What did you do?

CJ: At that particular time, I did programs for student organizations on campus. We also went off campus and worked with church groups, like going to small student groups off campus and explain the relationships with the university to the community.

AP: Was it implicitly recruiting students?

CJ: No, it was not. No, it was not a recruiting mechanism.

AP: Just a goodwill...?

CJ: Yes.

AP: Here is what the university is doing. Here's why we...

CJ: That was maybe a year. When I came, at that particular time, those types of programs were phasing out. In 1972, there was almost a whole new era. That, I did for about one year, maybe four to six months. Then, I took over another position.

AP: You would have come the year after E.G. Williamson retired as dean of students.

CJ: Correct.

AP: Had Frank Wilderson replaced him by then?

CJ: No. The fellow who was there, if I can remember, was Cashman.

AP: That's right, Paul Cashman.

CJ: Then, I think Frank Wilderson replaced Paul Cashman.

AP: What I'm reading about is that there are a lot of people in the Student Affairs world who were very upset when Cashman took over for Williamson. Their view was, we have had a professionally trained student development, student personnel [unclear] and we've done a lot of research and he seems to be taking us in a somewhat different directions and we're uncomfortable with that. Did you hear any of those kinds of discussions?

CJ: At the time I came, I was new so I was not really clear on the student development aspect of student personnel [unclear], because I had never really been involved in it. I was not really in tune with that. I do know that historically that Dean Williamson was the dean of Student Affairs. That's across country. When I worked on my master's degree at Hartford University, the first name that came up was, did you know Dean Williamson? I said, "I knew of him. He retired the year that I became involved with the university." So, his name is synonymous with this.

AP: In what university was it that you did your master's?

CJ: University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut.

AP: That was after you'd come back here?

CJ: Yes, when I first came here, I was here about a year or two. Then, I went there during the summer to work on my master's program. Everyone, even out on the East Coast, knew who he was. His name was synonymous in the student area. They were saying that without Dean Williamson, it's a whole new era. He was the person almost like a development inventor. I understand that he was very strict, but he was good. I shouldn't use the word strict, but very [unclear] and very concerned about working with students. The assumption was that Cashman did not come from that background and he probably could not provide that type of leadership.

AP: Cashman was a professor of speech, I think.

CJ: Yes.

AP: One of the topics I particularly wanted to talk with you about was your work with African-American fraternities—and all of the fraternities, I assume.

CJ: The way I really got involved with that is when I was doing Campus Carnival. There was a lack of black organizations involved in Campus Carnival.

AP: Is Campus Carnival always in the spring?

CJ: Yes, it always has been in the spring.

AP: Can you give me a month? Is it always in March or April?

CJ: In April, always the next to the last week in April, usually between April 19 and April 24. It's always a weekend, a Friday and Saturday, or a Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. It started out as two days, Friday and Saturday. Then, it went to Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

AP: Is it always held in the [University] Field House?

CJ: It was always held in the Field House since I've been involved with it.

AP: It raises money for?

CJ: It raises money for various charity organizations. The committee would pick the charitable organizations.

AP: So around 1970, 1972, you are running these and noticing that the African-American fraternity or student groups... You don't have to be a fraternity to participate in the Campus Carnival?

CJ: No, no, no.

AP: Any student group?

CJ: Any student group. It was open to everyone. Contrary to what a lot of people believed who think it was all Greek, it was not. The Greeks were the main focus behind the Campus Carnival. The committee and the people who were involved in it came from other student organizations, from resident dorms, etcetera. The dances and the stage shows were, basically, Greek because they were the ones that were organizing it. Now and then, a resident hall would be involved. It took a lot of work, dedication, organizational structure to do the performance that was done on the stage shows. They'd dance on the outside and they did plays on the inside.

AP: When you say, "dance on the outside," do you mean outside of the building?

CJ: No. They had a stage and they'd dance on the stage. They made big props and had a stage performance. Then they'd have an inside, like you're going to the show. The show was fifteen or twenty minutes. Then, they come out and get up on the stage and they'd dance for ten or fifteen minutes. Then, they had food, games, and everything else.

AP: Are there any records anywhere so we would know how much they raised for charity over the years?

CJ: There are some in this box. [unclear] I look in the archives, there's pictures and everything in there and there are records. They would average around \$22,000, \$24,000 for the charitable organizations.

AP: That's interesting. I was just reading about it in 1950 and they raised about \$2,000 then. So, it's escalated.

CJ: Oh, yes, it has.

AP: So, you discovered that African-American Greeks were not participating. What did you, then, do?

CJ: I sought out the black Greeks on campus.

AP: Can you give me the names? Is it sigma alpha?

CJ: I can give you the names. I do have the names.

[break in the interview]

CJ: I'm just thinking that when Dr. Boston and Randy Staten and Jim Beard was here... I cannot say sorority because, at that particular time, I didn't know that much about the sorority. The black Greeks [unclear] were probably larger on campus. Then, I think they phased down similar to, if you want to say, the white Greeks on campus. When things came up in the 1970s and all that, it wasn't fashionable, for some unknown reason, to be Greek so there was a phase down in it. That, also in the late 1980s, is when Campus Carnival moved off campus. I think it was that whole period of fluctuation that the numbers were down low in Greeks on this campus. You could ask Kathy [unclear] and June, who was also involved with the Greeks at the time. She came on campus. Before she became director, she was the Greek adviser. So, they were up and then between Campus Carnival, whenever that period was, and then they started going down and I think also that's when the slide in the black Greek organizations started going down and wasn't as visible on campus. That's a speculation.

AP: Then, of course, the other thing is it's going to be hard to trace because the yearbook stopped publishing just probably when they were at their height. The last yearbook is 1967 and we're suggesting that there was a kind of elevation of the black Greeks in the late 1960s. Bango, we don't have as much of an easy way to get a sense of visibility. The yearbook is a very interesting way, because there's a write up on the different fraternities and sororities.

CJ: When I came here in 1970, they were very visible on campus. They may not have done a whole lot of things on campus. Between 1970 and 1975—that picture was made around 1976, 1977—they were large as life on campus. Now, the activity that they were involved in on campus may have been different. They are, generally speaking, more community-based in their programming than they are on the campus. As far as putting on programs on the campus, they do more of their programming off

campus. One thing, I'm assuming, is it's because there are no houses on campus to provide that type of programming.

AP: How is the university known for students of color? You've been in this business for many, many years. What kind of a report card would you give us?

CJ: [pause] Probably a C. I've seen improvement, but I've also seen the lack of what I would say is more of a progressive movement. It depends on some of the areas that you're in or the area that you're working in. I remember when I first came here, the visual thing that I saw was students on campus, but I didn't see a lot of faculty and staff on campus. The faculty and staff that I saw on campus seemed to be in programs that were there for minorities, not in programs like Student Affairs, for example. I could be wrong on that. When I first came, I think I was probably one of the few persons of color that was involved in Student Affairs or student activity or Coffman Union.

AP: You mention that you've seen improvements.

CJ: I think by providing the Learning Resource Centers which were developed... I'm guessing it was around 1976 when the cultural centers came about, being funded by the university. I'm speculating that the take-over of Morrill Hall and the development of the Africano Studies Department and the Chicano Studies Department were the major push towards improving the university commitment towards students of color and also faculty and staff of color. It was almost like the issue was forced upon them through the Morrill Hall issue. I wasn't here at the time. It was forced upon them to take a look in relationship to students and faculty and staff of color. I wouldn't have any idea of the number of faculty and staff that were here at that particular time, but I would imagine it's increased two-fold.

AP: [unclear] check that number. Do you do studies of participation of students and student activities?

CJ: Yes, our office does. I don't.

AP: I'm wondering whether you look at minority participation, diversity participation.

CJ: One area that I do because I was involved with it in our office and that we try to improve—in my mind, it was not necessarily the fault of the organization—is student government. It's been my take that it has been difficult to get students of color involved in student government.

AP: Why would that be?

CJ: I think they have to look at student government as what can student government do for me? What is student government? What effect can it have on my participation or my academics at the university? It's just the climate within organizations for minorities getting involved. It's like, do I belong or do I not belong? The point is how one feels about joining an organization when they know that it's something... when I know I'm really not wanted. I want you to address some of my issues. If

you don't address some of my issues, whatever those issues may be, and if someone is not doing that, then why should I get involved when I can set in my own group? That's not just students of color. That's like PSO [Progressive Student Organization]. I can get in my own group and make and do my own thing and get the university [unclear]. Sometimes it's not a color issue; it's issues and programming.

AP: As you look around the country at our peer institutions in student activity, student development, how does Minnesota rank now?

CJ: That's really difficult. My assumption is that if you go out East to the Big Ten schools, and not just the Big Ten schools, they're probably more active there, but they've got a larger population to work with. I think the university is probably more innovative than a lot of other schools, like leadership programs and the type of programs that are being put on by our office in the university as an institution is farther advanced in trying to provide certain vehicles and things to try to improve the diversity on the campus. I think the university, in general, in looking at other Big Ten schools, is probably somewhat advanced in trying to bring about programs and diversity on this campus. But, I also think they probably have a [unclear] way to go if you look at Minnesota and if you look at the population of people of color in the state of Minnesota. If you go to a place like Michigan or one of those schools that's located within an urban area, they know what the problem is. They can see it. All they have to do is go outside the university and it's right there. But the university, if you look at that, then you probably look at the number of people on this campus who have never been associated with people of color [unclear]. They don't even understand some of the problems or some of the baggage that students of color carry to this campus. They can't comprehend it because the magnitude of the state and the University of Minnesota—I don't know if there's more than 30,000 or 40,000 blacks in the state—the environment surrounding the university has an effect on the university.

AP: One of the things we always ask in these interviews is, is there anything that I have not asked you that you think I should and that you would like to comment about?

CJ: [pause] I think in the years that I've been here that I have seen progress. I think there needs to be more progress. I think some people give lip service. I think diversity is a catch thing that, in reality, sometimes I don't see existing on this campus. I think the communication between various cultures needs improving upon. Overall, there's been improvement, but I think there's still a ways to go. I have enjoyed my twenty-nine years here at the university.

AP: I have two other questions for you.

CJ: Sure, go ahead.

AP: One of them is, are there names of some of these people that have been in the black fraternities for black students that were on the campus in the 1970s and 1980s that I could call up and just chat with? It's helpful to do interviews with students.

CJ: Oh, yes.

AP: Who would you suggest if I were to make some calls and see if I could talk to them?

CJ: Ann Stanley.

AP: Can you get me a number for her?

CJ: I will. Ann Stanley was involved with the take-over of Morrill Hall.

AP: I've heard her name mentioned.

CJ: I'm going to be meeting with her this Friday. And Johnny Sinar.

AP: How do you spell his last name?

CJ: I'd be guessing, but I'm going to meet with him Friday, too, and Steve Winfield, I'm going to meet with this Friday. Those are three people that I know that were here during the take-over. Ann Stanley and Johnny came out and were the first directors of the Black Student Cultural Center. It was called Black Student Cultural Center before the Africano Student Cultural Center. They were first directors so they could take you through the years of the 1970s to the 1980s. The other person, if he was on campus at that time, is Dr. Taylor.

AP: David Taylor, sure.

CJ: I would contact Jim Beard.

AP: Is he Minneapolis or St. Paul?

CJ: He's in Minneapolis. I would talk to Melissa Boyd, B-o-y-d.

AP: Do we have any kind of address?

CJ: She's a delta... I will probably see her and I will try to get you a telephone number.

AP: That would be great. It's helpful to have...

CJ: Oh, you need them because they'll have more of a perspective on this.

AP: Exactly, what it was like to be here.

CJ: Yes. I'm just going off the top of my head. Some of the things I've said may be not together, but those people can pinpoint it down for you.

AP: Did Ann Stanley used to be called Anna Stanley?

CJ: Yes, Anna Stanley, right. I've got a lot of information on her.

AP: I've heard about her in a number of interviews.

CJ: Oh, yes, yes.

AP: What is she doing now?

CJ: She was working for Heart of the Beast Theater group. I know she was overseas for a couple of years. She's back now. I'm going to be meeting with her and Steve Winfield and Johnny Sinar.

AP: I assume he's Dave Winfield's brother?

CJ: Yes, his older brother. There's a couple of ladies that you'd be interested in talking to and I'm trying to think of their names...besides Melissa.

[break in the interview]

AP: I thank you profoundly for participating in the interview and for your help and [unclear] being part of it.

CJ: Thank you. I can't guarantee everything. It's a variety of things and I'm just trying to piece things together and they may not all come...but if you talk to those people that I have mentioned, they can really put a good focus on it for you. I will give you some other names that can really pinpoint it for you, too.

AP: Thank you very much. Good luck.

CJ: You're welcome. Good luck to you.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

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