University of Minnesota Sesquicentennial Diversity Project

Interview with Kingsley Calvo-Jordan

Interviewed by Ann M. Pflaum

Interviewed in August 2000

Kingsley Calvo-Jordan - KC
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: This is Kingsley Calvo-Jordan. Kingsley, tell us about your background and how and when you got to the university.

KC: I graduated from high school in 1990 and applied to a few schools primarily out East. I went to school at the University of Hartford in Connecticut, then came back after a year and did some extension classes through the U and eventually got my GPA up to where it had to, and applied for day school. I graduated in June.

AP: Which June did you graduate?

KC: Last year.

AP: So it would be June of '98?

KC: Last summer, '99.

AP: What college were you in?

KC: I was in CLA; I was in Global Studies. I majored in international relations with a concentration in diplomacy, and had a minor in art history.

AP: If I'm not mistaken, your background is Hispanic, is that correct?

KC: Yes, Latino.

AP: Tell me about your impressions of the university wearing that hat. Did you find it a friendly place, a scary place, a welcoming place?

KC: Being that I had been living in Minneapolis since I was two years old, I completely acclimated to society while I was here in the Twin Cities. I would say that I didn't have any problems; people were very friendly. The thing I did notice is that the mentality of some of the kids is very homogenous. Everybody just comes from the suburbs, and it
seems to be an extension of high school at times. One of the things I wrote in my thesis was that if kids can get a little bit more diversity through their college years and travel a bit... For example, if CLA made it mandatory for the kids to take semesters or years abroad, that would have enhanced the scope of the college education.

AP: Did you do that yourself?

KC: I didn't because I didn't go for the quick four years. I took my time, and within that time I spent about four and a half months in Europe, and also I went to Peru, so I was able to see some different things but not through the university itself.

AP: Were you active in any Hispanic or Latino activities?

KC: Not per se. I had friends who were, and I kept up with what they were doing, but my primary concentration was to get done with what I had to do.

AP: How did you find your international relations concentration?

KC: I thought it was excellent. It was very stimulating and I really embraced the critical thinking. The biggest impression it left on me was to be up on current events and to be very aware of the big picture and how people make decisions, how perspective influences their thinking and socialization. Once you can understand those layers, you have a better idea of what kind of ideas to present to them, or any problems you might have with them you have a way of gaining some insight to straighten it out.

AP: Did you do any papers that you particularly recall?

KC: I think my thesis probably was good sum of how I thought, and where I thought diplomacy was lacking and what type of things within education [unclear], reconfigured so to speak, so working things from the inside out.

AP: Do you have faculty members that you consider mentors that you have kept up with?

KC: Not a hundred percent. I did really enjoy working with David Kieft. He was a professor who taught History and Diplomacy of European Diplomacy and also Russell Moses. They were very impressive because you were really presented with some ideas that were very different. It gave you an introduction to how diplomacy works and how fundamentally different people are in different parts of the world.

AP: What was the title of your dissertation?

KC: I think it was "Redefining Diplomacy as the Next Move." I spent so much time on it and I can't even remember the title.
AP: Tell me a little bit about art history.

KC: Art history was my social and cultural side of my liberal arts education. A lot of people who I come in contact with—diplomacy, history—are all well rounded people. I also developed a taste for that by traveling and seeing different cultures. Art history was a really nice way to get a social history and a cultural perspective of what I was learning through my diplomatic history classes and things like that. It was like a social commentary. They were fantastic. I really enjoyed them.

AP: Did any of these courses cause you to reflect in any particular way on your Hispanic Latino roots?

KC: To be honest, the U doesn't really offer anything quite like that. I did take an elective that was an in-depth analysis of Don Quixote. That was really good. But I tried to look for some of those things. I took a couple survey history classes, one on a survey of Latin America, and that focused primarily on Mexico. It wasn't really an emphasis or a concentration toward South America, Peru, Argentina, or Chile.

AP: Where did your family come from?

KC: My family came from Cusco, Peru.

AP: How did they end up in Minnesota?

KC: My mother came when she was about twenty-one, to see what was out there. Traveled back and forth for a year or year and a half. Her and my father met and built a relationship. They got married and then my father joined my mother in about '74.

AP: Where did you graduate from high school?

KC: South High.

AP: Tell me about your current position.

KC: Currently I am at Piper Jaffrey working with banking services. U.S. Bank acquired Piper. A new product they put out gives the client the ability to access their money markets and various portfolios through an automated system by simply using an ATM card. You can also get some online software so you can gain access at home. It's a new product, and not many of the brokerages/banks have it.

AP: How did you find your liberal arts preparation for the world of banking?
KC: The critical aspect was very good and helped me a lot. It helped me understand the underlining goals of banking, giving me the big picture to find out what the clients want and what the bank wants to offer them and at the same time being able to relate to and listen to the client. Actually being able to listen to the client was the biggest secret I've learned is to listen.

AP: You said find out what the bank can offer.

KC: Right. When you find what the client wants, you sort of have the ability then to go to the client, and basically they are telling you to develop these products through their feedback.

AP: What title would you describe your position as?

KC: It's in Operations. I don't know if it's a step past entry level or entry level.

AP: Since you've been there such a short time, entry level seems sensible. This is your first full year, is that correct if I understand the timetable?

KC: I would say it's under the Operations umbrella.

AP: Would it be called an analyst or is there some sort of term?

KC: It's a Prime Specialist, that's what they call it.

AP: That's difficult to understand. It sounds like a meat inspector.

KC: No one is going to understand Prime Specialist.

KC: It's a combination of customer relations and processing and developing, kind of fine tuning the problems. Overall, that's why we call it Operations. It's sort of the meat and potatoes of the bank.

AP: Do you have a group of clients that you relate with, or how does that work?

KC: I don't really deal specifically with clients. I deal more with brokers and sales assistants.

AP: And helping them do what?

KC: I help them, for example, a client wants to know if they can get an increase on their Visa or if they can get a debit card, or if they want to transfer some money somewhere, what's the fastest way, or bouncing checks and why that's happening.
AP: I would say that you are an assistant in Operations, working with brokers and sales assistants to enhance customer service.

KC: Yes, that's good. I would say I'm assisting sales assistant or brokers, but it's not quite like a sales assistant.

AP: Right. In this first year you were . . .

KC: Can I call you right back?

AP: Sure. Speak loudly so we are sure we pick up what you say. One of the questions that I had was, can you give me the names of some of the students you got to know who were active in Hispanic causes, because one of the things we want to find out about is that kind of experience.

KC: I would say there is a T.A. by the name of Ricardo Nevea, who works in the Economics Department. Another girl I met, I don't remember her last name . . . Jennifer . . . I'm thinking Esposito.

AP: There is a student organization, and I can call their office and find out who their student leaders are too.

KC: I know Jennifer definitely had an active role there. She was always inviting me to go to meetings.

AP: That sounds good. The other thing I thought I could use as I'm describing your position, I can say that "He entered the Operations area of the bank, assisting brokers and sales assistants in their interactions with customers." And then I'll quote that you have found your preparation in international relations a very good thing, and I'll make the point that I think is a very helpful point that one of the things that you've learned that's most important is listening.

KC: Right. I would say also that the next jump, so to speak, the next movement will help people more so because I will be going into the sales aspect, the trading side. This will really come into play there as well.

AP: This has been terrific. Thank you very much. Kingsley, can you give me your address?

KC: 1331 Fourth Street N.E., Minneapolis, MN 55413.

AP: What I'm going to do is send you a form to sign so that if we have space we can quote from you in our book and use your name, and we'll record this interview so it will go into the Archives.
KC: Sure.

AP: So if that's okay I'll send that to you and it will have a self-addressed envelope and you can just send it back to me.

KC: If there is anything else or if there are other questions, feel free to give me a call.

AP: Terrific. Thanks a lot.

[end of interview]