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SJSU: Diversity University

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[Music] What is now San Jose State University was originally established in 1857 as the Men's Evening Normal School, founded by George W. Minns. He was an American teacher, notable for founding this school, which was created in order to train teachers for the city's public school system. In 1862 by act of the California legislature, Men's Evening Normal School became the California State Normal School, and graduated 54 women from a three-year program. I became interested in the history of San Jose State back in the late 90s, as I've been on campus since 1990. You see probably the main indication of what the age of this campus when you're in the bookstore, and they sell these folders that have the Tower on it, and it says, "1857." That's a long time ago. And I thought, "Well if we're so old, how come there's not a day that we celebrate our history?" You think there'd be like you know, Founder's Day or Anniversary day, or something, and there wasn't anything. So I decided I'd look into that and asked a few people and go over and I'd ask them, a few others, and some actually told me there were history books written about the campus, and I could borrow one that they had. So I started reading this, and it was just very eye opening as to how we came about, and we actually started as a normal school, and that means we were here to train teachers on how to teach K-12, and there were many normal schools throughout the U.S. In fact, there were many in California. We were the first one state normal school in California. Narrator: That's right. Men and diversity came later, approximately 1868. San Jose State is the oldest school of higher education in the state of California. San Jose State: Diversity University. How do you change a culture of an institution that's been around since 1857? Of faculty who have-- Ultimately faculty have the power in a university to do the hiring. You have to change their way of thinking. Not easy. I began as Dean, I started writing newsletters to the Faculty of Humanities and Arts about the major issues. We had to bring the community into the university. This community surrounding the campus was not attending. So I sent out newsletters, and then I began to emphasize the need for diversity. Both in the student population to meet community needs and in the faculty. And it worked. We began to bring in minority faculty, and it begin to break the ice a bit. It began with these whole issues of race. Diversity only exists if you don't know people who are different from you. You bring in people who are different from you and you work together, and you find that they are competent. That's how we need to make changes. [Music] San Jose State in the city of San Jose, very, very unique relationship. It's one of the few universities that's really in the heart of a downtown, of a major city. Some of the history that many people don't know was that, initially the school attempted to kind of exclude itself, or seclude itself, from the city. They kind of wanted to make sure that their students were safe, they knew they were in the heart of a downtown, they wanted to make sure that sort of "downtown" didn't creep into the school, and then they really try to keep the students within the school. One of the initial setups for the school was to really be walled-off all the way around from the city, and all the buildings to face inward, and to really keep everything inside the school. And it wasn't until really maybe in the 70s that started changing to where the school wanted to-- and the students really wanted to be more a part of the city. The evolution of diversity on this campus has been stunning, to put it nicely. I thought at the beginning people could easier, or would be easier to talk about diversity, because it's right there in front of you. Talk about what you can see, talk about who's there. And yet it was difficult to knock on the doors of people's minds to put into words what they were actually feeling as a person, be it woman or man, or person of color, person of gender, it didn't matter. It was difficult

to get that conversations started. I thought that was strange, but then I like to talk and maybe other people didn't, so I took it as my challenge as a teacher to find avenues, to find ways, look for cues to engage people, to draw them into a conversation. Now let's just talk a little bit more this business of diversity. I have more fun when I enter my class, and by the way, this will be my 66th year of teaching at San Jose State University. One of my first things that I ask in my class is, "How many of you were born a Muslim?" And I'd maybe have three hands go up. "How many of you were born a Roman-Catholic?" And I'd maybe have seven or eight hands go up. "How about Presbyterian?" Maybe one, or a Methodist, or something like that. And then I'll say, "No!" "You were not born any of those." "You were born a human being." But again, let's go back. I said about music. It's diverse too. And I say, "I hope you like all types of music, and I hope you like all types of people." I think one of the great opportunities we have at San Jose State, and in this environment is that can figure out new ways of doing things that really address our community and aren't built on the way they do it in Dayton, Ohio, but that are really built on the environment that we're in, which we sometimes take for granted, but I think those of us who are really energized by it, as I believe most of the faculty and staff at San Jose State are, it's because we recognize this is the world, we recognize that we are really living on a-- in a global community, of the kind that clearly the future is going to get help, you know, the future is going to be about, that most communities are going to end up looking like the kind of mix that's happening in San Jose for the next several hundred years. This kind of coming together of very diverse kinds of communities and experiences is where the action is. These students who don't have a lot of privilege and don't come from backgrounds with great connections come into our world, and we have this opportunity to lift them up, to train them and to send them off, not only with greater skill set in performing arts, but also to send them off with greater capacities, for empathy. They leave us with a deeper, more emphatic connection to each other. So right from the start I was struck by how unique our students were. The theater is something that is necessary that needs to be diverse, so that all the students here get a chance to have their voices heard culturally, gender wise, age wise, that we give a full platform to those kinds of voices. I think diversity and theater is a prime example that we can make a difference. And we can show the fact that it is this link across humanity. There's artists we have as much responsibility that links us as one. It allows us to celebrate our differences and respect our commonalities. So again, it is this link. I always say you don't have to play the piano or pat your foot to the music. Well, that's what theater is. It says, "Here I am, let my voice be heard." I think we can do that better than anyone else. We prove that this last semester with a very successful production of Luis Valdez as the Zoot Suit, which sold out every night. Bringing the Hispanic voice and culture to this stage, done that with previous shows. We'll continue to do that because this is the place we can make a difference. This is a place where the artists can continue to be the vanguard of social change, and the artist have always been at the forefront of change. Others sort of catch up to us. From my observation today, yes, things have changed quite a bit. I'm really encouraged to see a much more diverse student enrollment. Just seeing more Latinos, and certainly more Asians. They were always there, but now they're predominant in numbers, you can really see the tenor even of campus life changed, because of who's there, and I think that that's significant in every way. It's significant for the state of California, for a state university to be able to educate its citizens particularly in company with each other. Another

thing I need to say as a Latino, I mean, I had Anglo friends in college. I had Anglo friends in high school, but I think what my friendships on that score really deepened in college. I belong to a circle of intellectuals, and writers, and poets, that used to hang out in the cafeteria. And we had tremendous conversations, regardless of what the racial, cultural background. As a matter of fact, they got interested in me, because they know so little about the Latino experience and I was a source for them. At the same time, I'm learning about Jews. I had no real working experience with a Jewish community. Some of my friends, some of my girlfriends were Jewish when I was in college. That was important. African-Americans also within the context of the Civil Rights Movement became my friends, and my colleagues, and my coworkers. All of that was really part of, again, the diversity of San Jose State, but also the diversity of California. Being a young Black man on this campus in 1968, it was a different world. 90% of the students were young, White suburbanites, and I felt very isolated. Being among the young Black males, we really felt brotherly. There was a common understanding that we were all in this together. Once people figured out that you were in it together, and down for whatever had to be done. And you had to prove yourself. You had to have discretion, you had to have courage. You had to demonstrate manhood, and there were always tests for that. You know, I was really proud to be in college. So it was important to me to be successful. And then that's kind of carried me throughout my life. And I can remember when we were track athletes, this was during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. You can see the problems. That they were going on. Now when you look at those statues, for the average person, you're kind of seeing the end but nobody knows what happened prior. Okay, as far as what the university could do better are in my opinion, I think it could probably do more outreach to Black communities, or diverse communities that different colleges and universities throughout the state and other areas that are heavy in minorities and to educate them more about coming to San Jose and the advantages it has and the different majors that it offers and so I think that's a key thing that the university needs to do, because I know I didn't know much about it in advance and once someone suggested it to me, I just started digging more and I know when I was a campus tour guide, that was one of the things I mentioned to some of the parents and students that I gave tours to that there are a variety of things that San Jose State offered. The Good Brothers was formed by a lot of guys who came to State at one time, who had difficulty getting housing, like I said, because they didn't have dorms when those guys were here. They were here earlier than me. So they kind of struggled, so they kind of banded together and they got this big old house and they all had different rooms, and they rented it out to each other. Bill Walsh was a frequent visitor. The great football coach. It wasn't really just Black guys. There were a couple of White guys, Jewish guys, as a matter of fact, who were members of the Good Brothers. And San Jose State has a real long history of really going out of their way to recruit Black players, Black athletes, student-athletes, and so this was like-- kind of like a perfect example of what they did during that period of time. I came on an athletic scholarship, a football scholarship. And basically we all got together and stayed together in a house, and the house was basically where all the guys, mainly African-American guys and other races came, and we worked together. A lot of us were from out of town, so a lot of our social events, we did them ourselves. Basically the one that really coined us was a young lady named Dorothy Han. She was a local, a Freshman, and so she would come to our parties. And then her mother would ask her, "What

happened?" She said, "Oh, I went to this party and there were some really good brothers there," and so that's how we got the name The Good Brothers. And so it kind of spread. but it worked out really good because our focus mainly was not only academic but livin'. When they came to town, they would send the new athletes over to us, to the Good Brothers, because we hadn't really broken down and got the housing that we should have but we were able to put some pressure in some areas and some of the people were pretty open-hearted, they realized that hey, we got to make these changes. So that was the beauty. I believe one of the greatest moments in the history of this university was when we allow ourselves to celebrate the contribution of our students without any biases. There were students that came in from this building in the journalism department. There were students that came in from the next building, from Clark Hall, from everywhere, to come over and congregate and celebrate the unveiling of this sculpture. that all of a sudden, became, in that instant, an icon of this university. And everybody embraced it, nobody was criticizing, nobody was saying anything negative about it. I stayed at San Jose State for all these years because I found that with all this you might say, anti-Japanese feeling they were having against, I felt that I can do something through judo and what students I worked with and they got to see that I'm just an American as the Caucasian students that were taught how bad the Japanese were Many of our champions in the past will be back. One of them was his name is Ben Nighthorse Campbell. He was one of the first Olympian, and he, after he finished judo, he went back home and he became a senator to represent United States Senate. I'm very happy to have stayed at San Jose State. I think that as important as it is to recruit all ethnicities and cultures, I think it's got to go beyond sports. Typically, that's where it happens. "Oh, yes, we're very ethnically diverse, because we brought in three African-Americans for our football team," Well what about the other programs? What about engineering? What about theater arts? What about the GLBT community? What have we done to recruit there? I think that it has to go way beyond sports, and I think that we've got to think of this intellectually for education and for the edification of our students. So the diversity in the classroom and the activist students in the classroom dragged me out of the classroom and really into local politics. And I treasure that experience forever, because it helped me learn more about how "politics" really works, not the political science version of it. But it also helped me be a better teacher and helped me learn to use experiential learning that is learning by participation, not just participant observation, active engagement. You know, I look back in those days, and I see other transformative experiences. The students got very involved in the campaign, shortly after me around campus to elect the first woman mayor of a big city, Janet Gray Hayes. She would've lost the election had it not been an overwhelming support that she got in the student community. Those were the days that students felt that they could make a difference. As long as that attitude is there, then students are welcomed to participate in the decisions that impact our lives, and the more they're empowered to do so, I think the better it is for everybody. You have to remember that this was in the mid 70s. So I'm one of those idealistic young men and women that graduated exactly four years after Watergate, the fall of Saigon, the peak of investigative journalism when journalism really was the pillar of the fourth estate, and it was a noble profession back then. So our Spartan Daily class has had-- we've got a number of Pulitzer winners that were on the Spartan Daily while I was there, photographers, as well as writers, a number of the "kids" that I was on the Daily with are still in the career. It's not often

that we see women be presidents of their own university campus or student body president. We never really see API communities or Polynesians step up in leadership roles, and so for me it's important that when I see Samoans, or when I see Filipinos, or when I see Asians, I empower them to become student leaders. When I see first generation college students, I want them to feel like they're accepted and they can achieve college, and so at the end of the day I want to impact a student, whether in college or in high school, that when they meet me they can feel that, "If she can do it, I can do it too." You can't be what you can't see. When I look at the future, when I see what can happen, I really think that what San Jose State can do, should do, is to really stand behind the promise and the responsibility that they make to the student when they are admitted. To say, "You are in, and we are going to support you every step of the way." What we have is something more powerful. We have the opportunity to really shape and transform the lives of first generation students, students of color, and of the residents of this community. If San Jose State can leverage those dreams and leverage those aspirations, and build really great support structures for them, we will become an unstoppable institution of change. The relationships I didn't think I would have when you think about diversity, and you look at what's in the room, you have me with a disability, you have someone from Kuwait, you have someone from Brazil, you have someone from Seattle, Washington, you have people you don't think you connect to age-wise, it all comes together and it's like a melting pot. And it just fits together perfectly, and that's how I learned what diversity was, and it's not necessarily all the people in the room, but how those people come together and how they all interact. When you ask me that question about my attitude towards diversity, I say, "Bring it on, more of it!" Now we probably haven't gotten to that point yet, or at least I haven't but I think by and large as time goes on, we get more said than I believe I've had experienced being said in other places. So I think focusing on diversity of ideology, diversity of experience, diversity of class. One of my colleagues who was actually-- parents were Mexican farmworkers is quite conservative in her ideology, and so I think that's the sort of-- I much more value that sort of thing, especially when these sorts of diversities of ideology and experience cut across what we might expect. I think what we need to teach our students is not about their own culture, they know their own culture. We need to teach them about other people's culture and about the culture in general, and about how culture works, especially how culture is constantly changing. And I think that's a very challenging, but I think that's really what universities are all about. So what it's all about really is reinforcing the things you should've learned in kindergarten, and if you didn't learn them in kindergarten, you should learn them now before you go out to what we call, the "real world." In quotation marks, but of course this is also the real world experience while you're here. I think it comes down to building a shared sense of community. Through that community, we'll learn more about each other and that would make our lives better. I'm kind of like a hippie in that way. That would make our lives better here, but it will make the society better too. What makes the experience as a staff member here is working with other faculty and staff, it really understands social justice work, it's beyond the idea of just diversity, but it's really working toward social justice and equity for everybody. And it's how we get to know other folks on a deeper level, and not make judgments based on how we perceive those identities, or all those assumptions that we look at somebody. Either those visible identities or those hidden identities, how we approach people is different now, and how the students are now seeing each other is now different. Back in 1971,

there wasn't a lot going on as far as the gay movement. I don't know if there was a gay student union at that point. I was aware of other gay people in my dorm. You just often weren't really out even though you might be meeting other folks, you knew that some of the professors were gay so I never really felt like it was a place that you had to hide who you were but there weren't just that many opportunities to be out. I got fired from a job once, I wasn't going to have that happen again and I was going to not let that happen to anybody else if I could help that. When I first went to San Jose State after being fired, I went to the President and said, "Look I just got fired from a job because I'm a lesbian. I'm a tenure track position, I don't want to be fired from this job. He said, "Oh, go do your work, we'll see." It was fine, and he didn't care. And so at least I knew I didn't have to worry about him. It was very lonely in a lot of ways. I was the only out gay or lesbian person on the campus for a long time. While I knew other people were gay, we have this thing called a "gay-dar." It was clear to me that they did not feel that it was something they wanted to do. So it was pretty lonely in that sense, but I worked with the students, I didn't much care what the other folks thought. My job was to try to help students make their lives more comfortable, more meaningful, more successful than they would have otherwise had. Aside from being a place to gather, the vision that I came in when I stepped into this role was to not just have this be a space where students can come, and feel welcomed and supported, and be affirmed in their identities, but also a space where we can fully develop our students so that they can be more involved on our campus. I believe diversity starts with self. This isn't something you can go somewhere and read a book on, and then feel enlightened by it. You really just have to personally experience it and understand places of privilege and how you walk on this earth and what lens you have on because without that, we just walk around blindsided and kind of blindly. Beginning, we had-- limited numbers of minority-type students on the campus in those days. We didn't really know what that was all about. We pledged-- a Japanese our only-- and that was not too long after World War II, and we wondered though if we should change his name when we turned him into the roles for the international, because his name was Sakomoto and would be pretty hard to hide who Sakomoto was but we finally decided that whether whatever they thought, we didn't care because Sakomoto was a terrific kid and he deserved to have his name intact. I have had Indian and Pakistani students, who share a room together who become very, very close friends, who are still friends, who visit each other for their weddings, and who stay in touch with their families, and who, after many, many, many years, are still keeping contact with each other. Those are the kind of relationships that we see that give me a lot of hope, that help people open their eyes. When I arrived at San Jose State, I discovered early on, however, that many international students don't consider themselves minorities, because they're not part of the population. How can they be a minority of the population? They may be from the ruling class at home. If you're not aware of international education at San Jose State and in your community, you're doing a disservice to yourself. Because it's a part of the world. It's who we, in the big sense, are. I was looking for a place that had immigrant students, first-generation students who really cared about getting a college education, but didn't know how to do that, and one of my goals was to expand the Academy and the role of education for a lot of people, especially for people who I thought were under-represented. So minority students, students who are first-generation, students who didn't know anything about the language, about the institution, and San Jose State University fit that bill, and I was excited also because I was working with a

community that was my research, so that's why I came back to San Jose State and San Jose State University. And so I'm thinking that a lot of it depends on your individual experience, what you teach, who you hang out with, and so forth, and for me, I certainly got involved in some things which allowed me from early on to be exposed to some of the ethnic populations and great to work with those students, having Asian students who were born in Asia, in an Asian religion class is great. They're resources right in the classroom. They can provide background about practices that they do at home or in the communities that I wouldn't even have much familiarity with because so much of what I learned, I just learned from the books. So I think that the old model of being able to put people in their different ethnic boxes and racial boxes, is not in line with the way that many young people are feeling today. When you think about us in Chicano Studies, in Mexican-American Studies at San Jose State, there's not a real understanding of what it is we do. People assume that what we do is we talk about the Mexican-American experience and make students feel better and more affirmed about their experience, and that is part of what we do, but we are also trying to do something that isn't typically done in the university, which is bridge all disciplines and we're challenging history and the way history is understood and defined. And so what we're doing is we're looking at the world in a way that people don't often have the opportunity to look at, but which is necessary to really understanding the world and how it works. And we're doing all that through a Chicano lens. Through the lens and experiences of the Mexican descent people and Latin American descent people in the United States, and that's something that's not typically done. When I first entered San Jose State, the transition from high school to college was a tough one for me. Born and raised here in East San Jose, the environment that I was in all the way up through high school, was predominantly Latino and African-American, and when I went to San Jose State for the first time, I really understood or at least felt or at least came to realize what the term "minority" meant. Because I always heard the term "minority," but coming to San Jose State, I felt what that meant, right? And I myself contemplated dropping out, and in fact, I didn't because of because of one person, which was Dr. Terry Christensen, who was there on campus, and he's a professor that had reached out to me personally. I think he understood what I was experiencing, and I think in anticipation of that, he kind of reached out and tried to walk me to San Jose State, so as I-- I still remember that one Friday afternoon when I decided, "You know, that's it for me," I was like, "This is not for me. I'm out of here." But I looked into his office, and there was posters on the wall, and there was a poster of Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King and others, and really his walls spoke to me because there was quotes that talked about the Chicano activism and the importance of diversity and all, and as I sat-- as I stood there, rather, looking at his walls and kind of contemplating my decision to drop out, I quite frankly was convicted because what his walls were basically telling me is like, "Don't quit. Don't give up. Too many people have paid a huge price for you to be here, and so for you to quit would be like spitting in their face," and so that very afternoon I made a conscious decision not to quit. As I neared graduation, with a kind of the acknowledgement and recognition that that it's a huge accomplishment to make it through a four-year university especially being a Chicano-Latino student. And so I did both. I walked through the traditional ceremony, and I walked through Chicano commencement, and so for me, that really reconciled those two experiences that I had at San Jose State. I have seen it, and we have seen it on this campus. They show us how to do it the right way. And they did it with

humility. We did it with our heads down, and they did it with the love of their country that nobody can question, ever. It's just the way of saying, "Hey, we're here." We are proud people, and everybody should be proud of America and making it better. [music]

