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Joseph P. Cosand (May 16, 1972)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

DR. JOSEPH P. COSAND

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Washington, D. C.

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is an interview with Dr. Joseph P. Cosand. May I ask you what the "P" stands for, Dr. Cosand.

COSAND: Parker.

ARENA: And today's date is May 16, 1972. Dr. Cosand is the Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education, Washington, D. C., Arena interviewing. May I begin, Dr. Cosand, by asking you to state where and when you were born, a general resume of your formal education, and then bring us up to date as far as your career is concerned.

COSAND: I suppose I might say that I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1914. Really I was born there on the way West with my parents, who were from Kansas, from a little Quaker area called Hesper, Kansas, which was some ten miles east of Lawrence, Kansas. There were a lot of farms around there and there was a little Quaker church and there is still a little Quaker cemetery there by the church, and a good many people came to California from that community, including Louis T. Jones. I remember well that when we were in California, the Jones' on their way West came to our home in Alhambra, California, and camped in our next door lot before they got settled in Southern California. Of course, from there they went over to Whittier [California]. After being born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, my folks moved on to Los Angeles [California] when I was six months old, so for all practical purposes, I'm almost a native Californian.

When I was seven years old my folks moved to Alhambra--that would be now just fifty years ago--and built the family home, which my mother is still residing in, and she celebrated her

birthday last March, a birthday of ninety years. So we're very much attached to the family home and all of us gathered there to celebrate her birthday. I grew up in Alhambra, went to Alhambra High School, Graduated in 1932 and went on to Whittier College in 1932, not knowing particularly what I was going to major in, but during my first year I became a convert to a great professor by the name of Gustaf Ostrom, and he converted me into being a chemistry major, as he did many other students at Whittier College. I believe he passed away here recently, but I have always said that he was one of the two great teachers that I had. The other one was a teacher at the University of California at Berkeley. While I was at Whittier I enjoyed very much the opportunity of a small college to participate fully in the many activities of that institution. I think the extracurricular activities at Whittier College perhaps were of more benefit to me maybe than anything else. I was a member of the college Knights, which is an honorary organization, and a member of that group for the full four years. I became a member of the Franklin Society when I was a freshman. I was football manager my sophomore, junior and senior years. A member of the college Men's Glee Club my freshman and sophomore year. Of interest, perhaps, is the fact that my first year--well, all four years I worked my tuition out at the college. The first year I was a groundsman and pushed a lawnmower. The second year I was a janitor and pushed a broom. The third and fourth years I was a laboratory assistant in the chemistry lab, and because of all this, I owe a great deal to Whittier College. The college saw me through my education and I wouldn't have had enough money otherwise to have attended.

Following graduation from Whittier I went to the University of Southern California and again was a laboratory assistant in the laboratories there at USC [University of Southern California] and completed a master's degree in chemistry. Upon completion of that degree, in fact just prior to completion of the degree, I became a Research Analytical Chemist for the Union Oil Company in Northern California, specifically in a little town called Oleum, and remained there for two and a half years until I realized that I wasn't cut out for the isolation of research chemistry. So I moved into the teaching profession and went to a little town up in Northern California, which is one of the most beautiful places in the world, Fort Bragg, California, and taught for two years in a high school. From there I went to Taft College in Taft, California and taught college chemistry for a year and a half.

Then I went into the war as a Navy officer and served in the war for three years--eighteen months of which were spent in the South Pacific in the Solomon Islands and eighteen months primarily at Cornell University, both as a student officer and as an instructor in the Midshipmen's school. Upon returning to the teaching profession, I returned to Taft and continued to teach chemistry for one semester, when they asked me to assume the presidency of Taft Junior College in July of 1946. And so from that time on I have been an administrator of four different community colleges,

three in California and one in St. Louis [Missouri], so I guess you might say I have been a college president for twenty-five years, until I left the St. Louis Junior College district, after having been there nine years. I left there in September of 1971 to become director for the Center of Higher Education at the University of Michigan and I was there only four short months when they persuaded me to come to Washington to be Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education. I came to Washington primarily for two reasons. One, the great respect I have for Secretary Richardson and the other for Commissioner Marland. I felt working with these two gentlemen would be a great privilege, and it has been.

ARENA: Would you mind giving the full name of Commissioner Marland?

COSAND: Commissioner Sidney Marland and Secretary Elliott Richardson.

ARENA: Thank you.

COSAND: So, I guess that's a rough outline of my professional career. I've had the pleasure of serving on several national bodies and this has been a privilege. One, I served as a member of the Carnegie Commission for the study function and financing of higher education since its inception, and that was five years ago. I was a charter member of the California Coordinating Council on Higher Education which was formed in 1960. I was a board member of the American Association of Junior Colleges and the American Association of Higher Education and the American Council on Education and served as its chairman during 1970-71. I am now a member of the Commission on Non-Traditional Study and a member of the Committee on Academic Tenure and a member of the Executive Committee of the National Center for Higher Education and Management Systems. I guess that pretty much does it.

ARENA: Thank you, Mr. Cosand. Just to make sure, in your stint of duty in the South Pacific, did you and one officer by the name of Richard Nixon ever come together possibly as old school mates?

COSAND: No, we didn't. I didn't see President Nixon during the war.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you came into contact before entering Whittier College in 1932, if you ever came in contact with President Nixon or any members of his family?

COSAND: No, I didn't, although my mother was knowledgeable about the Nixon family because of the Quaker background. As I mentioned before from Hesper, a lot of Quakers came

out of the Middle West and knew one another. For example, we had a Hesper reunion every year out in California and I always wondered how so many people could come from four corners, that seemed to come from Hesper to have their reunion out in California. So I think my mother probably was knowledgeable of and perhaps had met Hannah Nixon.

ARENA: And that, of course, would be especially the Milhous side of the Nixon family.

COSAND: That's right.

ARENA: As far as you recollect.

COSAND: The name Cosand is Quaker as far back as you can go and also in the Trueblood family, my grandmother was a Trueblood.

ARENA: May I ask you when you did meet President Nixon for the first time.

COSAND: I suppose the first time I met the President was when I joined the Men's Glee Club at Whittier College. He was already a member of the club and I had to try out, and I tried out for the Glee Club I guess the first week I was at college and was fortunate to be chosen as a member of this twenty-five member body. And that was one of the great experiences I had because I stayed in the Glee Club for two years and you get to know each other very, very well. We practiced every morning from 7:00 until 8:00. This was without credit. This was just a joy, and then we sang a great deal during the year to get enough money to take a trip each spring of anywhere from one to two weeks duration when we went up to Northern California, and when we sang at various churches or before school assemblies or even on theatre stages we were bound to get to know each other very, very well, and in particular this was emphasized when twenty-five men took off on a one to two weeks trip without any chaperones. We went unchaperoned. We sang undirected. We felt that we could do a better job by each one of us singing to someone out in the audience, to sing directly to that person, and the twenty-five of us became very good friends.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if there were any problems on such a trip, undirected, unchaperoned, such as possibly someone getting lost or someone getting off key?

COSAND: Oh, yes, those were the things that made it fun, I guess. We had a wonderful time. I look back on those two years of Glee Club experience with great nostalgia, and I think probably the President does also.

ARENA: Recalling your mentioning your being a manager of the
. . .

COSAND: Football team.

ARENA: . . . of the football team, and bearing in mind that the President was interested in football, what personal recollections come to mind in that regard?

COSAND: Well, I remember the President when he was in college and we overlapped two years. He was a junior when I was a freshman. I remember him as a person who always was eager, always felt that something could be accomplished. I remember when he would go into a football game and the game was lost, he would go out on the field as though he was going to win that game, and I remember that very well. I remember the feeling on the stands when they would applaud his enthusiasm as he ran out on the field. And I think that memory of him, and also the memory of the bull-sessions we used to have in the hotels when we traveled with the Glee Club or with the football team, he was always right in the middle of it, with strong opinions and perhaps the most articulate of us and by far the best debater.

ARENA: How can you account for his loyalty and enthusiasm for the team, when he did not have a chance to play on the varsity?

COSAND: Well, I think this exemplified him pretty much. He was a team man in those days, believe me, and he was always saying "Come on, gang, come on, gang." And so when he was on the bench he was rooting just as hard as though he were out on the field. This was part of him. It was a part of him as I remember when he was a member of the college Knights. This was an honorary organization of two freshmen and I think four sophomores, and so on. There weren't very many of us, and I got on that group when I was a freshman, and I got to know him there also. And he had high values as a member of the college Knights. I remember that very well. He felt that we should stand up for what Whittier College believed in, and this was his personality. When he became student body president he was full of this same spirit of desire to achieve, desire to have the college achieve--fight for what you believe in. This typified him.

ARENA: In view of the times, and by times I mean 1972, how can you account for the fact that while being very pro-Whittier College, he also stood up for some things that he did not agree with at that time? I am thinking particularly of his stand on student dancing. And whatever you do recall of that experience and that incident would be very helpful.

COSAND: I don't recall too much about that. I recall a little bit when he was student body president, he stood up again for what he believed was right and he thought the time had come for Whittier College to sanction dancing. And I remember the remaining part of my tenure at Whittier College

two years after he had gone, the college dances became a big part of our life and he had played a role in making this possible.

ARENA: Had you possibly ever been in any social situation where you did observe him dancing, not that you were looking at him in particular but just . . .

COSAND: I don't recall really. I really don't. I think perhaps one of the reasons was, although this wasn't the main reason, but the two of us belonged to two different men's groups. He was a very dedicated and ardent Orthogonian just as I was a Franklin, and these two groups had their own social activities and I suppose that's why we didn't run across each other there much. And maybe another reason too, neither one of us had any money, and I know the dances I went to were great occasions because I couldn't go to too many. I don't think he could either, perhaps.

ARENA: Recalling your mentioning your ties with the Quakers and your genealogical ties as well, and knowing that the President as well has equal strong Quaker roots, did you possibly ever attend religious services together? Do you recall that he may have addressed any group either at the college itself or the Friends Church in Whittier or the First Friends Church in East Whittier?

COSAND: Well, I was very familiar with both churches, particularly the Friends Church in Whittier where we would go to the Yearly Meetings that were held every year, and I have been at the East Whittier Friends Church many times too with my parents, but I do not recall ever hearing the President preach a sermon or address one of these congregations.

ARENA: You did mention his interest in debating. I wonder if you ever attended any of the formal debates in which he participated and how would you describe them in particular?

COSAND: Yes, I remember those well. He was a great debater. Again, it was his enthusiasm and his well-prepared background for the debate. He didn't participate in a debate on a hit or miss basis. He was prepared and did his job.

ARENA: You may recall that the Orthogonian Society was founded during the freshman year of the President. He may have even been the founding president, but he certainly was one of the founders, and the Orthogonians were associated, if I'm not mistaken, with the athletes in particular. And the

President, while not an outstanding athlete from the standpoint of varsity participation, was an outstanding student. Would you want to comment on that connection, his sponsoring a fraternity which was particularly dear to the athletes and yet he was such an outstanding academic man?

COSAND: Well, I don't see any incongruity about it because many of the Orthogonians and just as many of the Franklins were outstanding students, and as I went through my four years of college I suppose I had as many friends among the Orthogonians as I did the Franklins. And I completed my senior year at Whittier as president of the Franklin Society, so I suppose you might say I had some bias toward the Franklins. The orthogonians did stress athletics, but President Nixon has always had an interest in athletics as I have. I was football manager. I played basketball and I played tennis, and I have maintained an interest in athletics the same as he has. So, I see nothing incongruous about a person who isn't necessarily a great athlete belonging to the Orthogonians, if he had a great interest in this particular area.

ARENA: You may recall that the President has referred to Chief Newman, full name Wallace Newman, the football coach, and has evidenced a high regard for him. I was wondering from your observations and your recollections what you would say about the Chief, his personality, his influence on the character molding, and his role as a football coach. Whatever comes to mind.

COSAND: I think Chief was a great man. I gave a charge to the graduates at Whittier College back in 1962, I believe it was, when I received an honorary doctorate at Whittier College, and at that time in giving the charge to the graduates I alluded to Chief Newman and the fact that perhaps he had taught me as much as any professor had taught me at Whittier College and that was the values he stood for. I remember well as a football coach that if one of his team members was guilty of an infraction of the rules, say holding or unsportsmanlike conduct, the Chief would pull that player off the field and say, "Evidently the other man is better than you are. You can't compete fairly." I remember that very well. In other words, the Chief taught values as well as being a great coach.

ARENA: Dr. Cosand, you may recall that while you were a student at Whittier College there were ethnic groups and minorities. I'm thinking of blacks in particular, such as Mr. William Brock and Mr. Nathaniel or Nat George. Was that typical of the colleges of the era and if Whittier was different in that regard, what recollections do you have of that question, which is such an interesting question today, the role of minorities in education?

COSAND: Well, I never really thought of [William T.] Bill Brock any differently than I did of anybody else. Bill Brock was a member of the college student body and the football team, a great man. We always enjoyed Bill and I never thought of other colleges not having members of minority groups. We had a good many members who were Asians, in particular Japanese, and again Whittier College seemed to me to be what the Quakers would like to have it be, that is a person is what he is, that his religion or his race has nothing to do with it. I didn't see at that time, or I wasn't aware at that time of any feeling of discrimination in terms of religion or race, and to me that's the way it should be.

ARENA: From your personal contact and association with President Nixon during the college years, what comments would you make concerning his attitude and his association with minorities, if you recall anything?

COSAND: Well, I don't recall anything perhaps, except the bull-sessions we had were such that if he had any other feeling it would have come out, and he would have been challenged, I'm sure. So what I would look back on and say is that he had the same attitude I'm speaking about, a member of a student body where everybody was judged as an individual and an equal. And certainly this was true in the terms of the lack of affluence. Many of the football players didn't have much money, as many of the rest of us, and a lot of the fellows got by on not over two meals a day. And I know one football player, [Walter] Walt Dahlitz, a great big moose, sold blood sometimes to keep going, and I remember at one game when he had sold some blood a day or two before the game and he didn't have the energy he should have had. So when you have people where they view one another as people, as individuals, the lack of money, a different race, a different religion, becomes meaningless.

ARENA: Would you mind spelling to the best of your recollection, the name of Dahlitz?

COSAND: D A H L I T Z, a good German name.

ARENA: Thank you very much. Leaving the athletic scene for a moment, I am wondering if you recall some of the other professors, whom the President has acknowledged, from the standpoint of our gaining more information about these gentlemen, whom as I say he has acknowledged as very remarkable men. I'm thinking of Dr. Paul Smith.

COSAND: Well, I think Paul Smith was a hero. I loved Paul very deeply and the older I got the more I loved him. And in the years past, long after I graduated I would take every occasion to go by Whittier College to say hello to Paul. That was when he was president of the college. He was really

quite a tremendous individual. Another professor I remember with deep affection was Marcus Skarstedt. He was a mathematics professor, and of course, Gus Ostrom was the chemistry professor. As a chemistry major, these two gentlemen played a major role in my life.

ARENA: Would you mind spelling Skarstedt?

COSAND: S K A R S T E D T. He was a Swede and I remember his speaking so favorably as did Gus Ostrom, who was also Swedish, speak of their smorgasbords. This was a big part of their life. Another professor that I enjoyed immensely was Charles Cooper. Charlie Cooper was the adviser to the Franklin Society, and he was really one of us. I learned to love him then and I still do, and whenever I get the chance even today in Santa Barbara I take the opportunity to visit with Charlie and his wife. Another professor that I used to play tennis with was--was it Coffin?

ARENA: There was a Herschel Coffin, professor of philosophy.

COSAND: I'm not sure whether it was Coffin, but one of the professors I used to play tennis with a great deal. Then there was the director of the Glee Club the two years I was there, Howard Hockett his name was. He was the business manager of the college, but he directed the Glee Club on the side I suppose as a labor of love. So what I remember about Whittier College was a group of professors dedicated to the college, selfless, interested in the students and, believe me, during my sophomore year when the depression was heavy and I had no money at all, I owe a lot to the professors because they kept me in the college and without their encouragement I would have dropped out.

ARENA: Speaking of other professors who had this tie with the students that was rather intimate, and possibly that would be one of the main characteristics of the college as a whole, that there was this close tie with the students.

COSAND: It was a student centered college, believe me. The professors were interested in each and every one of their students, and you could go in and talk to the professor any time you wanted. This is what made the college great. Of course, remember, there were only 450 of us at that time. But even so, as a college gets bigger, I don't see why that personal warmth has to disappear.

ARENA: The professor I had in mind was J. Gustav White. I wonder if you had any contact with him?

COSAND: Oh, yes, he was the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] adviser, and I remember him well, because a good many of my friends were in the "Y", and this at that

time was a training school for YMCA secretaries and Gustav White was the leader of that group.

ARENA: Did you have any social contact with the President during these college years? He was two years ahead of you.

COSAND: Nothing other than what I mentioned before, and that was in the Glee Club and perhaps in an interfraternity dance or something of that sort, but that would be all.

ARENA: And was there ever an occasion to meet with his parents or other members of his family?

COSAND: No, no, I never met his parents.

ARENA: As this interview is coming to a close, Dr. Cosand, may I ask you if there is any area or any subject that I have not brought up that you would like to bring up at this time?

COSAND: Well, I can't recall especially, except for one thing and that is that during the thirties a group of students went to college there who were underprivileged in terms of economics and they have maintained a deep and dedicated interest in the college, in particular the class of Hubert Perry's. I think that is the class of 1934, which I believe was President Nixon's class. And you look back through the Alumni News and you'll always find that graduates of the class of '34 play a very big role in the continued support of the college, and I don't think that is coincidental. There was a spirit in that class that was quite great. I don't know why especially, maybe it was that you had such outstanding people as a President Nixon, as a [Richard] Dick Thomson, as a Hubert Perry and others. But that class of '34 stood out in my estimation perhaps as one of the great classes of Whittier College. I thought it was a greater class than mine of 1936, for example.

ARENA: Dr. Cosand, may I thank you for your hospitality in allowing me the privilege of this interview, and I know that historians of the future will be equally grateful. Thank you.

COSAND: Thank you, Dr. Arena.