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M. Jean Peacock on "Black Future Leaders"

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Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

M. Jean Peacock

Interviewer:

Leah Michele Cash

Interview Date:

March 28, 2016

Interview Location:

Rialto, California

Length:

00:30:00

Interview Summary completed by:

Nadia Lathan, 2022

Description:

Dr. M. Jean Peacock discusses her role in establishing Black Future Leaders to support building pathways to college and leadership for high-achieving youth for the Black community. Jean Peacock describes how she recruited prominent members in the community such as Lois Carson, Jim King, Marion Black, and Georgia Morris to build and support the program. Black Future Leaders included a one-week retreat on a university campus to attract students to the program, and CSUSB became the first institution to host Black Future Leaders. Although Peacock left the program in 1988, she continues to advocate for Black youth through her role in the University Faculty Mentoring Network where she recruits Black students and faculty to CSUSB.

Subject Topic:

- Black Future Leaders
- Latino Future Leaders
- Cal State San Bernardino

- West Side Action Group
- SAIL program

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Eisenhower High School	1321 N Lilac Ave, Rialto, CA 92376
Cajon High School	1200 W Hill Dr, San Bernardino, CA 92407
Latino Future Leaders	23170 Vista Grande Way Grand Terrace, CA 92313
Black Future Leaders (rotates between visiting campuses at UCR, CSUSB, and U of R)	n/a
University of California, Riverside	900 University Ave, Riverside, CA 92521
Cal State San Bernardino	5500 University Pkwy, San Bernardino, CA 92407
Westside Action Group	1180 W 9th St San Bernardino, CA 92411
SAIL (Student Assistance in Learning)	5500 University Pkwy, San Bernardino, CA 92407

Temporal Coverage:

- 1985 - 2016

Key Events:

- Director of SAIL program
- Founding member of Black Future Leaders
- Began doctoral program at UCR in 1988
- Became faculty member at CSUSB in 1993

Key Organizations:

- Black Future Leaders
- Latino Future Leaders
- Westside Action Group

- SAIL

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:01:58	Worked with Dr. Tom Rivera at Latino Future Leaders
Digital Video	00:06:55	Brought up idea of Black Future Leaders to Rivera
Digital Video	00:08:07	Began to identify and contact people would be interested in starting the program
Digital Video	00:10:53	Initial meetings were at CSUSB
Digital Video	00:12:23	Joys that working for Black Future Leaders has brought Peacock over the years
Digital Video	00:14:13	Challenges Peacock faced with BFL
Digital Video	00: 17:17	Georgia Morris' role in the program
Digital Video	00:20:02	Where she expects BFL to head into the future
Digital Video	00:23:13	What makes the Black San Bernardino community unique
Digital Video	00:25:22	Concerns about Black enrollment and faculty at CSUSB

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Leah Michele Cash [00:00:27] OK. Today's date is March 28, 2016. Yeah. My name is Leah Michele Cash...

Leah Michele Cash [00:00:39] and I am interviewing Miss Jean Peacock for the archive Black History and the Inland Empire Project and Jean for the project. Will you please spell your complete name for us?

Jean Peacock [00:00:51] It's M for Myra Jean, so it's M Y R A and J E A N Peacock like the bird P E A C O C K.

Leah Michele Cash [00:01:04] Excellent. So we are interviewing here in the home of Ratibu and Amina Carter. In the city of Rialto, California. So thank you, Miss Peacock, for taking the time out of your busy schedule today to conduct this interview with us. Okay, so now this interview, we understand that you have been interviewed before, and this interview, we're going to focus this time on the historic beginnings of Black Future Leaders, which, down to this day, has been an outstanding organization that has seen many young black leaders and prepared many young black leaders. And so what we'd like with the first question is for you to tell us a little bit about the beginnings of Black Future Leaders.

Jean Peacock [00:01:58] OK. I don't know. Are you familiar with the Latino Future Leaders that was started by Dr. Tom Rivera? OK, you are. I was working with Dr. Tom Rivera. I was one of the directors who reported directly—I reported directly to him. And at the time, he had started this organization that has been very successful, Latino Future Leaders. And one day he invited me to go. They had a mountain retreat. It was a camp in the mountains, and he invited me up. And I was so impressed. It was over 100 youth there. And they were just pumped up. They had many, many speakers. And it was a very interesting phenomenon that occurred because they were all speaking Spanish. And for one moment, I almost understood what they were saying. And then I stopped myself and I said, Wait a minute, I don't understand Spanish. Even though I've taken Spanish classes, I didn't understand it. So that ended that as soon as I thought about it, then I stopped understanding what they were saying. But what I was most impressed with was the energy in the room. And many of those young people have gone on to— I know Pete Aguilar was one part of that group and there are many others. But at any rate, at that particular time, some of us in the community have been talking about what

we could do with our youth. Edna Harring at the time was the principal at Eisenhower High School at the time. So you can see that goes back a really, really long way. And I've forgotten some of the other principals. So there have been conversations in the community about what can we do as role models to help our black youth. And you know, they see us as old and we don't know anything even at that time. You know, we're quite younger than obviously what I am now. And we came up with the concept of perhaps we could change their image of someone that they admired among their peers. At the time, a lot of attention was being paid to at risk youth. A lot of attention was paid to at risk youth. A lot of the local programs, the university, at risk youth. And at that time it would appear that the at risk youth, many of them were not interested in what we had to say, and we thought, what if there was a mechanism or a way where we could change their concepts of the role models, of the really hip kids on campus? What if we were to find a way for our students? Students having problems to aspire to something else other than, say, gain participation? And so one of the things I have thought about was years ago, growing up in Michigan, we have what we call Stepping Stones. The Stepping Stones was, I guess, very similar to I'm trying to think of something that's comparable to it here. It might be. Or maybe it's sort of like a Girl Scouts kind of a thing. And the girls, the black girls, participated in this throughout the academic year,

Leah Michele Cash [00:05:48] Something that brought about leadership?

Jean Peacock [00:05:49] It brought about leadership during the academic year, absolutely. And then for the summer, which they look forward to, everybody look forward to was going to this resort. And in Michigan, you know, going to the beach and places like that, it's not as common as it is here. And so everyone was excited about all the drawls of being a stepping stones was the two week summer retreat getting away and having that experience.

Leah Michele Cash [00:06:21] Do you remember around what year was that? Or around the time? What was going on that year?

Jean Peacock [00:06:26] The stepping stones would have been in the 50s.

Leah Michele Cash [00:06:29] No, for Black Future Leaders.

Jean Peacock [00:06:31] Well, there was no Black Future Leaders. I'm just kind of leading up to what was in my mind when we began. Some of us got together and started talking about what we what could we do to change the role models, if you will, among our black youth peers.

Leah Michele Cash [00:06:53] Who are seeking to be achievers?

Jean Peacock [00:06:55] Exactly. So what we so I brought to the table the idea of the thought of, "Oh, I remember stepping stones" and I remember how everybody in our high school wanted to be a part of Stepping Stones and a requirement of being a part of Stepping Stones was that there were certain expectations, academic or behavioral expectations. And so then we began and I talked about the Latino Future Leaders. So then I talked to Dr. Rivera about the Latino Future Leaders and he had something very similar in mind when they started the Latino future leaders. And so I said, you know, we're thinking about perhaps we could start up Black future leaders. And he said he thought that was an excellent idea. And he said, you know, we'll support you as much as possible. And one of the draws for the Black Future Leaders as it was for the Latino Future Leaders, is that the university will assist us and we would bring those kids on campus for two weeks for during the summer. I think it was for two weeks. It might have been a week, maybe I've forgotten. And so we were to develop the program. I identified some individuals within the community brought them together and we met. And then there was Lois Carson.

Leah Michele Cash [00:08:16] I was going to say, who were those individuals? Lois Carson?

Jean Peacock [00:08:22] Jim King, Yeah, Jim King and Marion Black, Georgia Morris. That's right. And then there was in Riverside, his father. He's an attorney. There were two people from Riverside. The one that I'm thinking about. His dad was on Clark. I think his last name is Clark. He is still there. His dad had been in the city council or something. I've got to get his name. I think his last name is Clark. He came aboard and like I said, he's an attorney and I have to find his name. I think he's still there. And then there was another female attorney whose name I'm blanking on. I have to get those names.

Leah Michele Cash [00:09:12] I think Danny brought her up. That is that Mary Johnson or that Johnson has something to do with the name Johnson?

Jean Peacock [00:09:19] No, it wasn't Mary Johnson, but there were— Danny wasn't part of the original group.

Leah Michele Cash [00:09:25] No, he's not a part of it. But he brought up those original names because when he speaks about who he admired, and the reason why he did what he did, that original group's names all come up.

Jean Peacock [00:09:43] Because Danny was a student at the time at Cal State. So there were, I think, six seven eight of us who got together and began to lay the groundwork and the foundation for the Black Future Leaders. With the thought in mind that we are wanting to change the expectations of our youth at the various high schools. And so we I know that we network with Edna, we worked with Eisenhower. I think it was San Bernardino high school Cajon. I've forgotten all the high schools that we had someone who worked with each high school. And I'm trying to remember if we worked with Margaret Hill at the school where she was, the continuation school. That I'm not a hundred percent sure, but we began to meet and we laid the foundation.

Leah Michele Cash [00:10:51] And where did you guys meet? Where did you guys meet?

Jean Peacock [00:10:53] We met at Cal State San Bernardino. Our first meetings were there because I was working there. I was the director of the SAIL program at the time. And as I said, as I indicated, I was reporting to Dr. Rivera. And so we patterned a lot of the program after the Latino Future Leaders because we saw that those things worked. But then there were some things that were unique to us. We had people who were willing to go to the campus and have meetings with the youth. And I'm trying to remember we had some kind of commitment. And I can't remember if for the student, I can't recall if the we're going back some ages, some years. Yeah, it's been a while. So I can't remember if the— I'm sure they had designed some kind of commitment.

Leah Michele Cash [00:11:54] So having the blessing to be one of the founding members of the Black Culture Foundation and— I'm sorry, Black Future Leaders. And seeing that whole, you know, that whole being a part of that whole span. What are some of the blessings and what are some of the joys that has brought you over the years?

Jean Peacock [00:12:23] Well, you know, just having an impact, just seeing our youth as they matured and gotten older. Kiana trying to think of Kiana's last name, she works with Edison and the things that they've done just to be able. There's a great deal of satisfaction when it's twofold. One, when you see youth with whom you've worked and you see them succeeding in life, you know, and reaching the goals that they've established for themselves. But there's also great joy when they come back. And I ran to students who I didn't even remember they were in black leaders and they come up to me and say, You know, you've really made a difference. You said so and so when I was in Black Future Leaders, do you remember me? And that is such a wonderful feeling. It really is. Even when you know you have— I worked with them for until 1988. I think about six or seven years before I went back to UCR to get my doctorate, so I left. And then after that, I was so busy in school that I wasn't able to work.

Leah Michele Cash [00:14:01] So was that one of the challenges that you met? Because I was going to ask you, what is there any challenges that you remember facing with Black Future Leaders with—

Jean Peacock [00:14:13] At that particular time? No. I think Lois Carson, I think ran into some challenges at the time with the administration that we had and I'm trying to recall. That was during the time of Anthony Evans. He was because of some of the issues that we had with Dr. Evans in the black community. And as you know Ratibu played a very integral role in terms of opening up some of the doors and the West Side Action Group and others— and Dr. Henry for sure. Absolutely. And so. The university at that time was very had gotten to a point, it was a particular point or time. You know, it says when it's time when an idea has come, it seems like everything was in place for or Black Future Leaders, because we didn't have any problems with the university in terms of students coming on campus, I think they only stayed a week. Yeah. So we didn't have problems with that and they were very supportive, especially because of some of the political stuff that was going on with that administration. So it was really a good time for us to launch Black Future Leaders. Yeah, I think as time went by, there were problems, I think, with funding and I know about Lois at one time had to move black future leaders over to UCR. I think they're back at the Cal State campus. Uh-Huh. And I think it was the same with the Latinos Future Leaders. But it was a time when an important time for that particular idea. So there was a lot of support from local community leaders, from our school principals, high school principals. Oh, and at that time for the university. So the only challenge that we face, we were just really working hard to make sure we had a GPA requirement.

Leah Michele Cash [00:16:44] Yes, the GPA requirement. Now, Georgia Morris is no longer with us, she was one of my mentors, someone I loved very dearly and I know from firsthand experience how she felt about Black Future Leaders. Oh yeah. And she was like, really very close to the organization. What do you think on her behalf that she brought to Black Future Leaders?

Jean Peacock [00:17:17] Well, I think with Georgia, as with all of the individuals that were selected to serve on that advisory board, you know, when you think about bringing people to the table to talk about developing a program and implementing the program, you want to bring people who number one have the expertise, who understand very clearly what you're talking about, what your mission is with, what the mission is exactly. And the expertise is not only their intellectual capabilities, but also their life experiences. Georgia had been a principal or may have been at that particular time. And so what was the reason that I felt so blessed is that in approaching this group of individuals, they

were all immediately on board. It wasn't like I had to sit and try to convince them of its importance. They were all very much committed to the community, all very much concerned about our black youth. And so as soon as I began to talk about, you know, this is something I that- yes, absolutely. You know, immediately onboard, there was no any one individual who really had to say, be the out front person. Everybody at the table was there to work in a collegial manner, cooperatively problem-solving. And so Georgia brought her particular area of expertise K through 12, you know, and the individuals also had the community ties to also assist with fundraising tied political ties— bringing other people in—

Leah Michele Cash [00:19:11] And the love for education.

Jean Peacock [00:19:11] Oh absolutely love— love for education and also a love for seeing or—

Leah Michele Cash [00:19:21] Excellence.

Jean Peacock [00:19:22] That's right. Among our kids.

Leah Michele Cash [00:19:23] She loved excellence. Oh yeah. She loved African-American excellence.

Jean Peacock [00:19:29] Absolutely. Absolutely right. I wish that I think his name was Jim Clark or James Clark, from Riverside. And I wish I could think of the young lady's name, who was an attorney, but it was an excellent group of people to come together and bring.

Leah Michele Cash [00:19:47] Yeah, that was excellent because you had a little bit of Riverside and a little bit of San Bernardino. And down to this day, that's not yeah, that's not the way the dominoes have fallen.

Jean Peacock [00:20:00] I know, because it's mostly IE area.

Leah Michele Cash [00:20:02] Yeah, yeah. So one of the things that Amina speaks about is future, and in Black Future Leaders, there is that word future. And it's like educating the young people to embrace their heritage or embrace those leaders in the community that have supported them. So one of the things is, and I guess this leads to my question, how do you feel about where Black Future Leaders is heading at this time and day?

Jean Peacock [00:20:45] To be honest with you, I'm not really sure. I left in '88 to go to UCR and I returned to the faculty at Cal State San Bernardino here in 1993. And you know how that is when you're working to get tenure and, you know, working on publications and things of that nature. And so I did not, I mean, I've heard from Lois and others, Marian Black and others, you know, about Black future Leaders and what they've been willing to— what they have accomplished. At one time, Lois and I had a conversation about doing conducting a survey to identify all of the youth who had gone through. And looking at how successful we have been identifying those individuals and conducting a survey, to my knowledge, I'm not sure that they've done that. I know Lois has done an excellent job. I know the board is much larger than it was when I was there, Danny was one who came aboard after I left. And I know that there are others on the board. And so I'm not sure about, you know, what the plans are for the near future.

Leah Michele Cash [00:22:19] But the thing I find fascinating and so remarkable and beautiful about you founding members is that if there was a serious issue or something that happened with Black Future Leaders, you guys are a minute phone call away and you would be there. Even like, for example, when you bring up about life and the things that you were doing on your educational journey. But it doesn't change, at the end of the day that if there was anything that happened with Black Future Leaders that these founding members would be there within a second. And that's actually very beautiful.

Jean Peacock [00:23:13] Yeah. Oh, you know, but you know I can say this Leah, and you know this really quite well. I think there's something very unique and special about the San Bernardino community, the Black San Bernardino community. Because, you know, we all go in different directions in terms of the boards and the organization with whom we interact or serve. But we come together, you know, if there is a major issue. Or, it doesn't have to be a major issue, but we come together and we—

Leah Michele Cash [00:23:53] It's just phone calls.

Jean Peacock [00:23:54] Exactly. It is phone calls, you know, we need help with this. We need help with this. We need people over here. We need. And so I think we're unique. I'm not, you know, I just don't think what we experience here in the San Bernardino community is, I think, is unique. I don't think we see it in other communities. I, you know, not even in Riverside and we can even have little issues among ourselves.

Leah Michele Cash [00:24:28] It is the case sometimes, but at the end of the day, when that phone calls made and I need you to be here—

Jean Peacock [00:24:38] You know, be at the church on this night on this day, we're there and we will come together. And one of the issue of our youth is one that we will coalesce around every single time. You know, the Black community here is really about social justice and equity. We really are. And so we may go off and you know, when's the last time I saw you, Leah, maybe at the graduation or something over at the Powell center or something or so. But I can always pick up the phone and I just say, Leah, if I haven't seen you in two years, I just say, be over at New Hope, at six o'clock. You know, we got to deal with this. You gonna be there. Yeah. And so—

Leah Michele Cash [00:25:21] When you get the phone call.

Jean Peacock [00:25:22] You get the phone call. So I think it's just, we just find those little areas where we serve. For me, I've been serving for these last several years with the Black students at Cal State San Bernardino. You know, I'm concerned about, you know, the number of students we have in college. You know, our numbers have fallen from 12 percent down to five percent. Black students on campus. I'm concerned about their success, I'm concerned about them going on to graduate school. And so this is the area where I have put a lot of energy, primarily because there are not that many Black faculty, you know? So again, it's not that I'm ignoring Black Future Leaders because I know that those— the people that, exactly. So where I have been is in the area where there was not having a lot of Black faculty. We have now more with than we had when Dr. Edwards was there. Yeah. Dr. Karnig was instrumental in bringing a lot of that exactly and opening it.

Leah Michele Cash [00:26:29] Knocking down the walls.

Jean Peacock [00:26:31] Exactly, you're absolutely right. A lot of admiration for Dr. Karnig. And so I put a lot of energy in that arena. But that doesn't mean that, you know, it's been at the expense of Black Future Leaders. So I think they're doing a really, really good job with Black Future Leaders.

Leah Michele Cash [00:26:52] Danny, he loves it. It's in his soul. His spirit. It's a part of him.

Jean Peacock [00:26:59] Exactly. Is he now the president of Black Future Leaders?

Leah Michele Cash [00:27:02] He's the president, he's still the president. And tomorrow we're going to interview Porscha, who's come through. And I guess she's on the board now. So that's getting an interview and an experience of a youth, who's come through the ranks of Black Future Leaders and now she's a board member. So from that

perspective of a young person, you know, and that whole experience, and so that happens tomorrow.

Jean Peacock [00:27:31] You know Kiana Wallace too, don't you?

Leah Michele Cash [00:27:32] I probably known them by face.

Jean Peacock [00:27:33] I think she's an executive at Southern California Edison. I think her parents, are from the church.

Leah Michele Cash [00:27:39] Yeah, Danny mentioned her.

Jean Peacock [00:27:42] I think it's Wallace, what is her last name? I'd have to ask Amina. Her parents attend the church where Amina goes, I think the last name is Wallace. I'll check.

Leah Michele Cash [00:27:55] Maybe when I see the face. When you see them around, go "oh, I know them." OK, so we want to thank you.

Jean Peacock [00:28:06] You're quite welcome.

Leah Michele Cash [00:28:07] For your time. Miss Jean Peacock. Myra Jean Peacock.

Jean Peacock [00:28:12] No, just Jean. Forget the Myra.

Leah Michele Cash [00:28:17] No, when I was looking at your folder and I said, "Jeez, first name is Myra?" That's a beautiful name.

Jean Peacock [00:28:25] I don't know. I just couldn't. You can always tell with somebody, you know, if I get a long distance, phone call where it's coming from—

[00:28:32] And they'll say Myra?

[00:28:34] Well, you know, in the south, I'm from the south and I identify with the South, Texas. And so if it's someone from Texas, a member of my family, it's Myra Jean because they always call your first and your middle name. You know, it's just not ever one name. If it's from Michigan, where we live, it's Myra there, if it's Myra Jean, it's from Texas. If it's Jean, it's in California because I dropped the Myra in California.

Leah Michele Cash [00:29:03] Okay, so we are very grateful that you took this time to speak about Black Future Leaders because we did want to put you on tape, just putting all the founders together and collaborating with their story. With this special event that we're doing.

Jean Peacock [00:29:20] I'd really love to find the names of the other— I'll see if I know I don't have any documents that have come through. But Marion Black perhaps could help me with or Lois Carson could help with the other—

Leah Michele Cash [00:29:35] They've been interviewed.

Jean Peacock [00:29:37] Did they mention any of the other board members?

Leah Michele Cash [00:29:40] I would have to watch the interview, their interviews to see because if they sat down with Ratibu, they may not. The conversation might have gone, and with Lois it might have gone with NCNW, and with Marion, we don't know.

Jean Peacock [00:29:54] I want to get the names of those other individuals, especially the attorney, and I think.

End of Interview:

[00:30:00]