Listening to Indians

JOHN TIPPICONIC,
Comanche - Cherokee
December 27, 1976
Tempe, Arizona

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135. The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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NO. 140

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:

Today I'm talking with Dr. John Tippiconnic, and he is the head of the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University. I would like to ask you about your program here and your work, John, but before that, can I introduce you to our people by asking you about yourself? Have you always lived here in Arizona?

John Tippiconnic:

No. I am a Comanche and Cherokee Indian. I was born in Oklahoma. At a very young age my family moved out to New Mexico, and my parents were educators on the Navajo Reservation, and that's where I grew up, on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico and in Arizona, and I've spent most of my years in these two states.

SM: What schools did they work in?

JT: They worked in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools at Mexican Springs, which is just north of Gallup, New Mexico, and on a small Navajo reservation near Albuquerque, called Canyoncito. They were there for a number of years.

SM: So then you had experience with school life from the very beginning.

JT: Yes. I assisted them, and because of where we were located, I've attended BIA schools, I've attended public school, and I've also attended mission schools.

SM: You've had a vast experience in our school system and all its variations. Would you like to venture an opinion which one you liked best?

JT: Well, no, not really. They all had their good points and bad points. The mission school had a very sound academic program, also the sports program was good. The BIA school was rewarding in that I got to work
not only with a fellow student, but I worked with students at different types of activities. I really don't favor one over the other as far as my own experience is concerned as a student. As a teacher I might favor one over the other.

SM: If you were going to be a teacher in one of those schools, which would you prefer then?

JT: Well, today we find that Indian students attend basically four different types of schools—the BIA federal boarding school or day school system. Number two would be public schools, #3 would be mission schools, and #4 would be tribal or contract schools, and I would probably prefer the later—tribal or a contract school—simply because these are schools that are based upon a philosophy of the people themselves, and they encourage parental and community involvement; they encourage bi-lingual education, and the materials that are relevant to the students, so I would probably prefer that type of school.

SM: Isn't that the newest of the four kinds?

JT: Yes it is.

SM: And it's beginning to take hold now around the country pretty well?

JT: Yes it is. You see more and more tribes contracting with the federal government to run their own schools. In fact, there's legislation now, the self-determination act, which makes that possible.

SM: And in these schools they're taught their own history, their own language, their own culture?

JT: Yes.
SM: As well as all the other usual academic subjects?

JT: Right. And you see more bi-lingual type programs and materials being developed right there at the school, which are relevant to the students and their backgrounds.

SM: It sounds like a happy answer to the problems of the past.

JT: Yes, we hope so, but these schools face tremendous problems in addition to challenges. One of the major problems is survival. Before the self-determination act, schools didn't have a sound base of funding, and it was a continual battle to find monies to operate the schools. We hope that, with the self-determination act, that the funding aspect of it will be partially solved. In my own experience, I was located at one of these schools, the Navajo Community College. It's a college that's run, operated, controlled by the tribal people—in this case the Navajo—and there we were continually going after money just to operate the school, and because of that, it took time away from other matters that we should have been involved in—the curriculum development, or the training aspect of Navajo people themselves.

SM: Does this legislation correct that problem or aid it now, so that the funds are more available?

JT: Yes it does. It does. Not at the college level, but at the elementary and secondary level. Tribes can contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and utilize BIA money to operate the school.

SM: Is it correct that the expenditures from the federal government for education of Indian children has increased substantially in the last decade or so?

JT: Well, they've increased, I guess. I don't know how substantial the
increase has been. You see more and more Indian students going to public schools now than in the past. You see more Indian students going to contract schools in recent years. Even though it has increased, I don't think it has increased at the level that it should be increased. We still have a very definite need for monies to educate Indian students at the college level.

SM: Because these federal government funds are for the elementary and secondary levels?

JT: Primarily they're for elementary and secondary. They do provide money for college level, but it's limited, very limited. We see more and more Indian students who are interested in college and want to go to college. Money is especially lacking for graduate work. You know, you have money available for college, but preference is given to undergraduate work, and today we see many Indian students who are interested in graduate work, but because of funding, find it very difficult to pursue an advanced degree.

SM: Back to Navajo Community College. That school, then, gets some help now from the government, but not enough to solve all its financial problems. Is that right?

JT: They do get federal money. There was a bill that was passed through Congress called the Navajo Community College Bill, which provides operational money to the college.

SM: A specific bill for that school?

JT: Yes. And the language of the bill indicates that Navajo Community College will receive monies that are equivalent to what is utilized at a BIA like institution. Like Haskell, or SIPI [Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute] in Albuquerque, or the art institute in Santa Fe.
So there is legislation. However, when I was there we had difficulty with that, because we were never able to get from the BIA a figure, a realistic figure, on what they spent at one of their institutions to educate an Indian student, and also, we had difficulty in getting a realistic budget funded by the BIA. We would comply with their requests and submit a projected budget two years in advance; however, we had no guarantee that what we had projected would be funded. In most cases it wasn't funded; we were funded at a lower level, so it meant that we had to go back to Congress and approach Congress for an add-on or supplement to our existing budget. Usually we were able to get some money added on to it, but still it wasn't at the full funding level. We still had difficulty.

SM: You were always sort of up in the air about where the finances were coming from for the next year?

JT: Yes. That took a lot of our time and, as I indicated earlier, it took time away from some of the other areas that we should have been involved in.

SM: Were you in administration up there, John?

JT: Yes, I was vice president for academic and student affairs.

SM: So then you were involved in this problem with the funds and the budget, as well as the academic affairs too?

JT: Yes.

SM: I want to find out more about you personally, too. You went to school in these various places, mostly in New Mexico and Arizona then?

JT: Mostly in New Mexico. I started out at a public school, then I went
to a BIA day school, then I went to junior high at a public school in Oklahoma, went back to Oklahoma.

SM: Without your folks?

JT: Without my folks, yes. I stayed with an uncle. Then I came back to New Mexico for high school, and went to a Navajo Methodist Mission school in Farmington, New Mexico, and after I graduated from high school I went to Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, where I received my undergraduate degree in education, social studies and math education.

SM: Did you teach at all in the classroom before you went back to school?

JT: Yes. I taught in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the public school system there for two years. That was mathematics at the seventh and eighth grade level. After two years there, I went to the Navajo Reservation and taught at a BIA boarding school. I taught fourth grade one year, and I taught at the junior high level in social studies for two years.

SM: Had you learned some place to speak Navajo during this time?

JT: Well, I'm not fluent in Navajo. I know bits and pieces. I never have taken any formalized instruction in it, only what you learn on the playground and just socializing with Navajos.

SM: Enough to get along with. So then, after your teaching on the reservation, did you go back to school again?

JT: Yes. After teaching at Tuba City in a boarding school, I applied for a program at Penn State University. They had a program there to train Indian administrators in educational administration, and I went back there and received my master's degree at Penn State in educational
administration. I stayed on and completed the course work for my doctorate in ed administration.

SM: Do you have an Ed.D.?

JT: No, Ph.D. In educational administration.

SM: And then you've had experience. You've been out there in the schools teaching several places?

JT: Yes. And part of my experience at Penn State was an internship. We were out in the field for a school year, and we were encouraged to visit state departments of education; we were encouraged to travel a lot, attend professional meetings, to visit school systems.

SM: This must have been kind of expensive. Did you have to stand the expense, or did you get help from the school or the government on that?

JT: Well, when I was in the program at Penn State, I was still officially an employee of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and so they did help me. I went back. My internship was really part of my regular job with the BIA, so they allowed me the freedom to travel around to get to meet people.

SM: You got around and saw a lot of conditions all over the country then?

JT: Yes.

SM: Can you tell us about some of those?

JT: Well, although we travelled some out of the Southwest, I focused in upon the Southwest. My area of interest has been the student, and
how the student feels about his experience in the school setting. How the students might feel about the teachers, how the students might feel about their peers, their classmates, or the school itself. So I did a lot of talking with students, and administered questionnaires and did some studies that involved student attitudes about school. I have an interest in tribes and what they're doing in education as far as their own efforts—you know, the tribal contract schools are divisions of education within tribal structures—what they're involved in, what they are doing.

SM: When you were talking to the students during that year, did you get any pattern coming through, anything that was repeated more often than other things that were on their minds?

JT: Well, my first involvement was just with the BIA schools, so I questioned students at boarding schools, and these were boarding schools on the Navajo, and I questioned students at the junior high level, about how they feel about the boarding schools. And one thing that stuck out was that the students liked school. They said, "Yes, I like school." I asked them directly, "Do you like school?" They said, "Yes." And I can accept that, because I'm not sure they could answer otherwise, that they liked school.

SM: What does that mean now, John? That they were afraid to say otherwise? Or that they simply had to admit they liked it?

JT: Well, I think that in comparison to their home life, and in comparison to the condition that they came from, they probably liked school. We're talking about boarding school students, and up on the Navajo. These are students that tend to come from the isolated areas; they still tend to live in hogans; they're taught Navajo as their first language; opportunities for them are limited at home; they don't have all the conveniences that the boarding school can provide them;
they can't watch T.V. every night; perhaps they don't have three hot
meals a day like they would have at a boarding school; they don't have
a nice warm place to sleep; those things were there at the boarding
school, and those were the things that they identified with. Now
that's not to say that there are not some disadvantages at boarding
school, because there are. They're away from their family, they
leave home at an early age, and students expressed this also. They
expressed a lot of things that they didn't like about it. Loneliness
was a factor that came out. They did miss their families, they
missed their brothers and sisters, their aunts, their uncles, their
extended families. They expressed that. When I asked them, "What is
there at this boarding school that you like" one of the things that
they came out with was their bed. "I like my bed." And I thought
that was rather interesting, but as I analyzed that, it became clear
to me that the bed, their bed, was perhaps the only place they
could call their own in a boarding school situation.

SM: Nobody else's. Just mine.

JT: It's mine. Everything else they had to share—even their desk in a
classroom they shared with someone else. The bed was that one place
that was their own. If they felt like telling another student to
get off, they could do that, because it was theirs.

SM: That's interesting. You don't think of things like that until you
dig and find them like you did.

JT: Right.

SM: So generally they were having a good experience with the wrenching
of homesickness and a few things like that.

JT: Well, they indicated they liked school, yes, but that's common. Even
in student attitudinal studies outside of Indian education, you find in most studies 80% of the students say, "I like school." Very few are critical. However, in a later work that I did, I compared BIA students and public school students, and I found that public school students were more vocal, they tended to say, "I don't like school," you know. They told why they didn't like school, and they didn't like a principal, they told me, "I don't like the principal," and they probably told me where to send him, too. But they were more vocal, and they identified with AIM, they identified more with the militant activities.

SM: The public schools now, they're not boarding schools, are they?

JT: No. The public schools are not boarding schools. Students attend on a day basis, and they are students that are from the local area, you know. They're the students of teachers, of public health workers, of people working in a tribal structure; they're the students who have more exposure; that have been off the reservation more. They watch T.V. every night, and they identify more with what's going on outside of the reservation area. They're not so isolated.

SM: You got a different reaction from them. More critical?

JT: Yes. More critical of school, general, of their teachers, administration, of the courses, and almost every aspect.

SM: Neither of these schools had a bi-lingual program, did they? Neither the BIA or the public schools?

JT: No. Nothing that was fully integrated into the school. There were some experimental-type programs that were on the fringe yet, but not fully integrated.

SM: That hasn't really got into full swing until these new schools that
you were speaking of a moment ago, the fourth of the four categories, where the culture programs, the bi-lingual and the American Indian history and so on have been taught deliberately and carefully. Now then, have you ever had a chance to get an impression from those schools like you did with the other two kinds, the public schools and the BIA schools?

JT: No, I haven't. I hope to do that, but I haven't yet.

SM: Do you have a kind of a feeling that they will be favorable?

JT: I think so.

SM: Someone raised the question if it's such a good idea to separate the students, and keep them only with people of their own tribe, their own group, their own whatever, instead of letting them merge with the population as a whole more. Have you an opinion about that?

JT: Well, I agree that there needs to be interaction with populations on the outside, but perhaps I disagree with some as to when that should come about. For example, at Navajo Community College we felt that the Navajo student, perhaps at times, did not fully understand and wasn't fully aware of a lot of their own history and their own culture. You know, it's been documented that their self-image or self-concept is at a low level, and so we felt that by basing an institution upon the philosophy of the people, and making that operational in courses and just the general atmosphere of the institution, that a student would come to know who he was better. They're more aware, there would be pride in who they are, they would understand where they're coming from, where they're at, and then, that would give them the ability to function in society wherever they went. If I know who I am, then if I go down town Phoenix, or to Oklahoma City, I can function a lot better than if I have a poor self-image, and I really don't know who I am.
SM: Would the time of finishing the first two years of college be an ideal time to make that break?

JT: Well, I guess it's hard for me to put a time on it. It varies. You almost have to take it as an individual basis, but that was our concept, yes, at the college second-year level. And we had some success with that. You know we graduated students; they went off to the four-year institutions; we had some feedback from the four-year institutions saying there is something different about those students, we don't really know what it is, but they're achieving, they're able to adjust to college life.

SM: They accept themselves more?

JT: Yes.

SM: They're aware that they're important too.

JT: Right.

SM: This is another opinion too, that instead of aiming at developing four-year colleges for Indian youngsters, it would be better to have them stay at the two-year level with their own people than merging with the student body of a bigger, more heterogeneous school.

JT: Yes, that's a philosophy that's being advocated. You know, you see right now a number of community colleges being developed nation-wide. There's a consortium in Denver that they're all bound by, and I think there're about 12 different community colleges on reservations now. Yes, I would tend to agree, because if you develop a community college, then you have a little more flexibility to do certain things. You can integrate the culture or the way of the people into the curriculum. It's very difficult to do that in a four-year institution, because it's
real hard, you don't really have the full commitment to do that in many of the four-year institutions. It's very difficult.

SM: Does that mean that a four-year institution is more organized in a certain way and less easily changed, or adapts itself less easily to the various situations?

JT: Yes, I think so. A four-year institution, of course, has their program of study and it's difficult to introduce anything that might be different. It's difficult to bring change into it. We have various programs that can do that. We have Title VII money, which is bi-lingual education, and we see four-year institutions receiving these grants, but in many cases they're still out on the fringe. They're not totally accepted or integrated into the curriculum. They're out there; if the money goes, then probably the program goes.

SM: The biggest change, then, has come in these two-year colleges, these dozen or so of them scattered around the country, as contrasted to the major four-year colleges and universities, in connection with the Indian students.

JT: Yes, I would say so.

SM: Like Navajo Community College, the one at Pine Ridge?

JT: They are comprehensive community colleges, and when Navajo Community College was first started, one of the concerns was that there were many Navajo people who could not get into a four-year institution. Perhaps they lacked some academic skill, and these people weren't being provided the educational service by any institution, and so that was to be part of the function of the Navajo Community College as well—to bring in people perhaps who were deficient in certain areas and build up that deficiency.
SM: These schools have an open door policy then too, don't they?

JT: Yes.

SM: Do they also have the regular curriculum that other community colleges would have?

JT: Yes, they have an academic program that leads to an AA degree.

SM: Now do they add on the Indian culture and Indian history courses, or is their load heavier, or do they take a little more time, or leave something else out? How is it balanced out?

JT: No, at Navajo Community College we require every Indian student to take six hours of Navajo history and culture, which they could take a language course or arts and crafts or history or religion. They are required to take that. That was made a part of their requirement, and it transfers to a four-year institution. It might be in humanities or an elective, but their course work wasn't really extended or put beyond what would normally be.

SM: It wasn't more burdensome. Instead of an elective that someone might choose in the humanities or social sciences, they would take these Indian culture courses.

JT: Right.

SM: That explains it very well, they wouldn't have to leave out the required courses of the regular curriculum either. Good. Well, do you want to reserve your final judgement a few more years before you decide if it's ideal yet, or if it can be improved some other way?

JT: Yeah, I probably do. I'd like to see more institutions arise where
there is more parental involvement, where it's community based, where the needs of the community are being addressed by an institution.

SM: Now in a place like Navajo Community College, parental involvement is difficult because of the distances involved?

JT: Yes, it's difficult in most Indian schools. There just hasn't been a history of parental involvement. You know, it's recent that parents are becoming involved in the education of their children. In public schools we see more and more Indian people serving on boards of education. In BIA schools they have advisory boards, which are only advisory in nature, have no authority or legal power to do anything.

SM: At Navajo Community College they had three medicine men who served as resource people on the campus. Do you remember them?

JT: Yes, we had an advisory committee made up of medicine men, and we had a medicine man also on the faculty who taught courses. Andy Natonabah taught Navajo history and culture, religion. One interesting note on that, he was part of the faculty and the institution, Navajo Community College recognized him for his knowledge in the Navajo way of life area, and he was compensated, his pay scale was equivalent to that of a Ph.D.

SM: That's interesting, isn't it?

JT: Yes it is.

SM: I saw an ad for a medicine man in one of the Washington schools. In fact, someone commented on it that this is unusual, but it's already being done.

JT: Right. Most of the instructors in Navajo, in Indian studies area, were traditional people. Many of them have never been at a school.
SM: It was a great experience to be at Navajo Community College.

JT: Yeah. If you remember the campus itself, it's very striking, and when it was being planned, the architects worked side by side with Navajo people and elders.

SM: Were you there then?

JT: It was being built when I first came there.

SM: They still hadn't finished the culture center when I was there.

JT: It's done now. They're going to have their dedication in April. It's the tallest building on the Navajo Reservation. Six stories.

SM: That's a fascinating place. But now, back to you. You got your degrees at Penn State, and you worked out here. What was your next position after that?

JT: Well, after I received my degree I went back to Navajo Community College. Then I came down here to Arizona State.

SM: How long ago was that, John?

JT: I came down here in, oh, a year ago, January of '76.

SM: Can you tell us about the program here now? What is it really doing?

JT: We primarily have two major functions. One of them is academic program which leads to a degree in Indian education. The other major function is one of resource and service to the Indian community.

SM: The community of the university or the whole area?
JT: No, the whole area. Primarily Arizona, all the Indians in Arizona, although we do branch out into neighboring states. The academic program right now is a master's level program. A person receives a master's in Indian education. It's a 30-hour program we offer, oh, 13 different courses in Indian education.

SM: Can you name a few of them?

JT: Sure. We have courses that deal with curriculum and development, we have courses that deal with community-school relationships, community development, problems that teachers have working with Indian students; we have a course in anthropology, and then we have a number of independent studies courses which are pretty flexible and can deal with almost any aspect of Indian education.

SM: That would be an arrangement between a student or a prospective student and one of the instructors?

JT: Correct.

SM: Indian education--does that mean education for Indian students?

JT: Indian education, I guess, is a term that really isn't clearly defined. To me it probably means providing educational services for Indian students. It doesn't say by whom, but providing the educational services.

SM: Good point. Do you have non-Indians in the program?

JT: Yes we do. We have, in fact, majority of the people I found in the program when I came were non-Indian. We had something like 70 people, and the majority of them were non-Indian.
SM: Is that because of their sincere interest in learning more about Indian people and culture, and how to make a contribution?

JT: In most cases, yes. There are people who are interested and want to teach Indian children, and yes, we have taken an active role now in recruiting Indian students. We've been fairly successful. We've got a number of students who come from Oklahoma, Kansas, this past year.

SM: Do you teach any Indian languages?

JT: There are no Indian languages taught at present time. However, we are looking at that situation and we hope. We're trying to get a bi-lingual program going, and we tentatively identified, oh, Navajo, I guess, as a starting point.

SM: That would be the largest number.

JT: Yes, and that's where most of the resources are right now, you know. Materials are being developed in the Navajo language. There are people available who can teach it, so that's probably the starting point. We hope to branch out into some of the other languages in the area, you know—Apache, Papago and Pima, Hopi.

SM: This is a little bit unrelated, but I heard that Peter MacDonald said something about a separate Navajo Nation. Do you know what he means by a separate Navajo Nation?

JT: Well I think what he means is that he would like to see Navajo Reservation developed to the point where they're somewhat independent.

SM: Like a state or like a city or county?

JT: Well, I think he's talking more in terms of the economic situation.
SM: He isn't talking of a separate nation like France and Germany and the United States?

JT: Well, no, it's probably more in line with the state than anything, but he's looking for economic development on the reservation, where jobs will be provided for the Navajo people, where they'll have their own school systems, they'll have their own police, law enforcement agencies.

SM: They have much of that now, don't they?

JT: Yes they do.

SM: The reason I wanted you to help us with that is because those words can be interpreted just about the way anyone wants to, and people who have a little antagonism will interpret them to enhance their antagonism.

JT: I don't think it means that relationships with federal government or with the United States will be severed. That doesn't mean that. It means that given the opportunity, the Navajo Tribe would like to develop a lot of their own resources, and develop their potential.

SM: They have some great resources too, don't they?

JT: Yes they do.

SM: Economic resources like oil?

JT: Oil, uranium, gas.

SM: Somebody said there are 144 oil wells up there now.
JT: Um hm. They're moving right along. They're developing the educational programs up on the reservation quite well. You know, they have a division of education within the tribal structure, where they coordinate certain activities of the schools on the reservation. They're involved in programs that are training more Indian Navajo teachers. In fact, we're working with them right here at ASU in a counseling program for Navajo people.

SM: Coming back to your program here at the university then, one of the parts is to work with the Navajo Nation, the Navajo Tribe, the Navajo government?

JT: Yes, that's it.

SM: To help them cooperate?

JT: Absolutely. That's part of our resource and service function. We like to work with tribes in whatever way we can. Of course we're limited by our resources, our capability. However, we want Indian tribes to come to us if they have a need, and if they feel that we can help them meet that need, then certainly we want to do that.

SM: Do you have more Indian students here now than, say 10 or 20 years ago?

JT: Oh yes, definitely. We probably have around 300 now at the present time.

SM: Three hundred Indian students now out of a total student body of what?

JT: It's like 34,000, 35,000.

SM: It's grown tremendously, but 300 out of 35,000 isn't a very big percentage, is it?
JT: No, it isn't. We're going after more students, but one of the difficulties here has been the high drop-out rate. Lot of Indian students come, but they drop out, they can't cope with the situation here. There are a number of reasons why they drop out. They range from their academic preparation to loneliness, to lack of transportation, to just their inability to function in this type of environment.

SM: That's hard for some people to understand too, but it's a very real problem if it happens to you.

JT: It is. I think that the institution can do more in that area to make the transition smoother for Indian children. They do it for foreign students—a student from overseas who comes here, they don't have to go through registration. They have a committee, or they have a foreign club, or whatever, that takes care of enrollment for them. But for an Indian student going through the registration at a large institution like this, it is a very frightening experience, if you don't know anyone and you're thrown into a hall where there are thousands and thousands of people milling around. It is frightening, and I can understand why many students will turn around and leave and never come back.

SM: Just disappear?

JT: Right.

SM: Do you have enough staff to cope with these things?

JT: No we don't. In our center here, there is only one other person and myself, and the secretary. George Gill is assistant professor, and between George and myself we're responsible for all the different courses—all 13 courses. And, of course, we have a secretary. We
have three graduate assistants who help us in our lab—we have an Indian Ed. lab here—but it's inadequate. We can't really deal with lots of the problems that students have.

SM: Is the state giving you, well, shall we say, hearty support in this?

JT: The institution here is. The Dean of the College of Education, the assistant dean, the president of the university, has endorsed and given us support; however, our budget and our staffing is very minimal right now, and it's going to take a while even yet. In order to grow and change you've got to justify the change and the growth, and that's what we're doing right now.

SM: The state legislature isn't smothering you with funds?

JT: No.

SM: You get some from the federal government?

JT: No, not at the present time. We have in the past. We're going after some in the future. In fact, we're going to submit two different proposals this February, and hopefully, they will be funded, and we will receive support.

SM: I hope so too. Well, now then, your plans for the future. You've indicated that you hope to grow in the area of counseling and recruiting.

JT: There are a lot of different activities on campus here, that are provided for Indian students. We're a center that is involved directly with Indian education, so we don't go outside of that area. There are other programs on campus. You know, there's a counseling program in the Indians affairs office under the dean of students. There's an Indian counselor there, there are other people, there are
other programs. There's the Upward Bound program with Indian students involved; there's a library training program for the Indian students; the school of social work has a program for Indian students, so there are a number of things going on, and one of our functions, as I see it, is to help coordinate activities on campus here; sort of be the umbrella, if that is possible. It's difficult in working across departments and across colleges, but we're pursuing that, and hopefully, can gain that kind of status.

SM: Well, you're in contact with Indian students probably more than anyone on the campus. Have you noticed that they feel reasonably comfortable here? Do they run into any kind of discrimination that makes them uncomfortable, or is it simply the change from their old environment to a new one?

JT: I think it's a combination of all of those things.

SM: There is a feeling of discrimination then?

JT: Yes, I think so.

SM: Is it unfavorable? Sometimes it's a favorable discrimination.

JT: No, I think it's unfavorable in a lot of cases. In some cases the discrimination is stronger in areas where there are a lot of Indians than in areas where there are not a lot of Indians. I feel it around Phoenix in my everyday activities.

SM: One Indian student said he was sort of treated like a special person, because he was the only one in his class. And I talked to some Indian youngsters who said the same thing, that it's great, it's very special to be an Indian, because they hadn't run into anything excepting admiration and attention, that sort of thing.
JT: Well, you know, it's been said that it's "in" to be Indian now. Not too long ago, in the 1950's, you know, when they had the termination policy, then people were ashamed that they were Indian. People would identify with other groups, or wouldn't admit to the fact that they were Indian. Now there is a certain amount of proudness.

SM: Is it getting better, John?

JT: In what respect?

SM: In the respect of an even break, let us say, or fair consideration for Indian people?

JT: Well, it's hard to say. It's hard to say if it's getting better or not. Of course, I relate to education, and if you look at the situation right here in Arizona, the relationship between federal government and the state, I'm not so sure it's getting better. I think we need to really define the roles that each plays, and what role does the federal government play in the education of Indian children, as opposed to what role does the state play, and this is especially critical, I think, on reservation lands where you have a public school, and the state might expect the federal government to play a major role, and the federal government might expect the state to play a major role, and as a result there is conflict, there's friction, and there's funding at a lower level.

SM: The situation is still very complex then, isn't it?

JT: Yeah, Indian education is very complex.

SM: I mean Indian life, the whole thing.

JT: Definitely.
SM: Well, of course, we all keep hoping that you'd say it is getting better. In some ways I suppose it is, in other ways you're not so sure?

JT: Yeah. If you look at it from a positive point of view, at least there are efforts now being made by Indian tribes to do things for themselves. They are being listened to to a certain degree. There are resources available to Indian tribes for them to do their own thing. There are more people being educated, more and more are coming out of college now; more are in college every year, so things are looking up.

SM: Like one person said, "Well, you see me in my office--that couldn't have happened 20 years ago, or 30, but it is happening today. That's a good sign too.

JT: Yeah, definitely. But if we are working with Indians we almost have to look at the local situation. We can't generalize because of the nature of the Indian population. We have a lot of different tribes, each tribe has their own customs, they have their own language, their own lifestyle, and, you know, I get requests all the time from teachers saying, "I have Indian students in my classroom, you know, two, three, four, maybe five Indian students, and I realize that I should be doing something for them, but I don't know what. Now what should I be doing?" And what they want is really a recipe approach, a very practical one-two-three type thing. You know, "I do this, I do this, and then I can forget them," and that is not the way to approach it. You have to look at them from an individual point of view; look at their backgrounds, get to know them a little bit; know their history; look at their culture; talk to their parents. What it really means is that the teacher's going to have to go out of his or her way with that extra effort, and I don't know how many teachers are willing to do that nowadays. It's just teacher attitude, counselor attitude, administrative attitude, is a major factor, a major concern today.
SM: And there are practical limitations on how much one classroom teacher can do about one individual student, too, if they are burdened with numbers that are hard to handle. So it backs clear up to the original funding of the whole educational process.

JT: The funding, and then programs that should be integrated into the total district or school program. We see programs now in most of our public schools that are federally funded, that provide services to Indian children to meet their special need--they're Title IV out of the Indian Education Act--and most of these programs have Indian staff involved, whether it's a teacher or a teacher resource person or a counselor. But most of them are on the fringe, not totally accepted by the districts. If the money was to stop, then the programs would probably go. They're doing things, they're developing curriculum materials, they're getting parents involved, but I don't know how it's going to infiltrate the system yet. That's what it needs to do--it needs to become part of the total program on a continuing basis.

SM: Then it would work with less resistance?

JT: Right. Total acceptance.

SM: John, how do you like it here at ASU yourself?

JT: I enjoy it. I find it quite challenging. I like to be involved in the educational process at this level. I thoroughly enjoyed Navajo Community College--it's an institution that I support--but one of the reasons why I left it was to develop Indian leadership, and I saw it as a function of an institution like this to develop that Indian leadership.

SM: Do you keep good contact between the schools?
JT: Yes, we work on a number of programs cooperatively; we offer some of our courses up there. Yes, we have good working relationships with them.

SM: Then you'll have students coming down from there, just because you're here?

JT: Right. The student body president from Navajo Community College is now a student here. So, yes, we have good relationships with them, and I hope that--I'm sure it will--continue, and I hope it will grow and be more meaningful. But I enjoy it here; there's a lot that needs to be done, and at times it becomes frustrating because you have to deal with the university system like this. It's slow; things come about maybe slow, but I think we're moving in the right direction, and we're beginning to develop more of a working relationship with tribes, with Indian people and organizations; they're beginning to recognize us here, and, you know, they request our input on certain things, and so, yes, I enjoy it.

SM: In spite of the fact that you're a Comanche-Cherokee yourself from Oklahoma as a child, still you have more real associations with the people here in Arizona than back there?

JT: Yes I do.

SM: So you almost feel more at home here?

JT: I do. When I go back to Oklahoma I feel a little lost, like a visitor. And I think it's beneficial in ways. I found it beneficial at Navajo Community College, because I wasn't Navajo, I could deal with them in certain ways that perhaps a Navajo couldn't.

SM: You know the alumnus from the school here get letters every so often,
hoping that they will send a gift in to the alumni society, and you can specify what you want it used for. Do they specify they want it used for the Indian center?

JT: Yes, they can do that. Yes they can.

SM: Maybe that wouldn't be a bad idea if they would make that a little more clear.

JT: That might help a little.

SM: You know people are very much interested in something they have a part of.

JT: Right. We have a number of activities here at the center which perhaps are different. We have a *Journal of American Indian Education*, which is published through the university, and we select the articles—it's a forum, you know, for professionally written articles about Indian education—that comes out three times a year. In the spring we have an annual Indian education conference. Last year we had over 600 people come to the conference. We provided workshops in 14 different areas of Indian education.

SM: Out around the state?

JT: Well, the conference was held right here on campus, but we had participants from all over the state, from California and Nevada, New Mexico, very good turnout, and we want to see that grow and continue.

SM: Do you have to supervise that activity as well as your other problems?

JT: Yes.
SM: You're pretty busy, aren't you?

JT: Yeah. One of the difficulties I have personally, I guess, is allotting my time between administrative matters and, of course, the classes I teach, and then other expectations are made to me from the college and university. We're quite busy and we like to get out into the community as much as possible, and become visible and talk to tribal people and just see what their needs are out in the community. It's a valuable part of our program.

SM: And it's a growing one. I hope it grows even further.

JT: I hope so.

SM: John, I want to thank you very much for this conversation. We appreciate it.

JT: Well, if I can be of assistance at any time in the future, let me know.

SM: I'll remember that. Thanks very much, John.

JT: Thank you.