

Excerpts from Oral History Interviews with Stan Charnofsky & Ed Peckham

On November 4, 1968 at California State University, Northridge, white football coach Don Markham allegedly assaulted African-American football player George Boswell. The Black Student Union demanded that CSUN fire Markham for his actions. After Athletics Director Glenn Arnett declined to do so, the group marched to the Administration Building (now Bayramian Hall) and demanded to meet with acting campus president Paul Blomgren.

Dr. Stanley Charnofsky and Dr. Edmund T. Peckham were interviewed in 1991 by John Broesamle for his book *Suddenly a Giant: A History of California State University, Northridge*. In November 1968 Charnofsky was the Educational Opportunity Program director, and set up the meeting between the students and Arnett. He walked with the protesting students to the Administration Building. Peckham was Dean of Students and working in the administration building on November 4th. Charnofsky and Peckham discuss their memories of protester Eddie Dancer's actions in the building that day.

Excerpted Transcript from Stan Charnofsky Oral History:

SC: Now, in the room where we were held, Spencer, Dr. Spencer was an older man, he was confused about what was going on. He said, "I'm not sure I know what's going on." So I said, maybe Dr. Spencer needs to be clued in to what's happening here. And Spencer said, well, I thought that the coach, I mean, what I'd heard about the coach, went out on the field to get the nonparticipant off. I thought he was just doing his job. So, Eddie Dancer said, doing his job, old man? How'd you liked to get kicked, and he kicked out at him, and hit him on the shoulder.

JB: How hard? What force?

SC: Well, with some force, but not deadly force or anything like that. Now, the chair spun around, it was one of these chairs like this and it spun around, and I yelled, "wait a minute, what are you doing?" And a couple of us jumped forward, and that was the end of it. There was no- That was it. He stopped. Not that we were threatening him, but we just said, knock that off, you know, and he did stop. Now, later in court, Bugliosi, who was the prosecuting attorney, tried to imply that he was a karate expert. That he had taken his shoes off and gave him a karate kick, trying to do damage to the man. Nonsense. It was a spur of the moment thing. He just reacted emotionally. It wasn't even a karate kick, he just kicked at him like that. And it spun him around, and he was shocked by it, but not physically terribly hurt. So, I saw Eddie Dancer do two acts of violence that day, and that is all I saw in terms of the entire day of any violence.

JB: What about literal threats of violence? For example, an account that appeared in Scene magazine, the first issue of Scene magazine in 1969, has Byrne Fernelius remarking that knives were held to his, to, pardon me, to Glenn Arnett's throat and Sam Winningham's throat in the PE building.

SC: Yes. That was a bunch of crap. And I'll tell you, I know Byrne very well. But, you know, when someone's standing over you like the kids were, and they were menacing, if their fingernail touched you on the neck, you go, oh! It's got something sharp on my neck! It was nothing! No one had any instrument in hand in that room in the PE building. No one. Nothing.

- JB: At any point, did you see signs of knives, scissors, razors, any of these things as weapons brandished at all?
- SC: No. I saw one. Eddie Dancer was cleaning his fingernails with a, it might've been a penknife or something. And he was doing that, and, you know, you could've taken that to be a menacing thing, but I didn't. I just thought he was cleaning his fingernails.
- JB: Any other sign of weapons? Anything that could be used as a weapon that was being?
- SC: I saw no sign of weapons all day. Not a weapon.
- JB: Did you feel threatened or frightened at any point?
- SC: I felt a little betrayed, because I was supporting the students. And I felt terrible for what was going on. But, a little bit of a radical part of me was saying, I hope something good comes out of this. You know, maybe they'll catch somebody's attention, because the stuff at San Francisco State was going on at the same time and things like that, and I thought, well, this is our episode. But maybe people will wake up and do something for these Black students as a result of this. Now, I didn't like their methods. I didn't like taking over a building and forcing people and, you know, implying threat at all. See, later, you must know this already, later the implication was that it was a conspiracy, because they were charged with conspiracy.
- JB: Right. I was going to ask you that question.
- SC: Yeah. And the implication was, it was a conspiracy because someone had checked out the plans of the administration building prior to doing that. Well, the argument from the Black students could be sophistry, but the argument was that this was a kid that was studying architecture or wanted to study architecture, so he got the plans. Now, I would say to you, trying to be truthful and not protective of anyone's side, that yes, I'll bet you the Black Student Union eventually would want to know how to secure that building. But had Arnett that morning said, okay, I'll take care of Markham, we wouldn't have walked over to the administration building! So, the conspiracy was not for that day to take over the administration building and lock everybody up and hold them until they could dictate to Blomgren their twelve or fourteen points or whatever. That was not their intent that day. Their intent was to confront Arnett to get the guy out of there! Arnett refused to do it, and even, I would say, lied. I can't fire the guy. Only the president can do that. Oh, let's go see the president was then the next step. That's how I saw it. Now, I'm not saying they wouldn't have gone to the administration building the week after and held it to get what they want, but the episode that day elevated, escalated out of Arnett's intransigencies, as far as I can see.

Excerpted Transcript from Ed Peckham Oral History

- EP: I think—just let me follow up on that. I think the story gains credibility only from the fact that he did eventually meet with the students, and they did give him their demands. And there was then this, uh, what they considered to be an implicit agreement on the part of the president that he would concur with the demands, if they were in turn to evacuate the building. Which indeed they did at one stage late in the afternoon, uh, but in the meantime of course the, all the people had been compelled to stay inside the fifth floor rooms where they had been. I was in the office of the vice president for administration, Dr. Spencer, who was a lovely man who was, uh, really, almost a

father image to me when I came to this university, and things happened, that I thought were very bad, uh, he was, uh, not a young man, he was in a swivel chair, and he was pushed very sharply by one of the people who came into his office, slammed against the wall, uh, there was a knife in view. It was not a knife that was held by one of the students, it was a knife that was held by a person whom I had not known before, and who was really, of all the people around that day, he was the one who caused, I think, the greatest fear in the mind of some, because he had a really quite a although, uh, I seen him some since, uh, he had very wild sort of look in his eye. As if, uh, and, as I say, you didn't know what the purpose was going to be that day, and he, and Archie Chatman, were the two people who maintained control in that office. There were seven or eight of us in that office, and we were just not allowed to just leave. (long pause)

JB: You knew you were in effect hostages.

EP: Uh-huh.

JB: Did anyone try to test that, at all? Do you recall?

EP: You mean, tried deliberately to get up and leave? (both talking) I can't say that we did. Sam Winningham was there, uh, Glenn Arnett, myself, I believe Earl Wallace and just, uh, and another one who at that time, was a junior member of the physical education staff, who's still here, whose name just totally escapes me. No, none of us actually, I guess, tried deliberately to burst out of that room.

JB: But you knew that if you—but you knew that you were being held.

EP: Yes.

JB: It was implicit in the situation.

EP: Oh, it was, and there was a menace in the way, particularly that this other man, I don't know whether I should even give you his name, for the record but, uh, do you want me to?

JB: You may or uh--

EP: Well, I mean, for the record.

JB: Sure.

EP: Because he was charged with an offense, and his name was Eddie Dancer, and he was a person who I'd not met at all before that day. Uh, he was not a student.

JB: He wasn't?

EP: I don't believe so. (John mumbling in the background) Uh-huh. In retrospect, we found that a number of the people who were involved that day, were not students. Remember these were days, John, as I said to you were, we had very, very few people who were Black students.

JB: This is interesting. The, his role that day, of course, has been the subject of some contention, and specifically the way in which he kicked or pushed vice president Spencer has been, uh, whether it was a relatively harmless act of demonstration or remonstrance, or whether it was an aggressive

or belligerent act. Uh, a degree of violence, all of that has been in some dispute. How did you see it? You were there.

EP: My recollection is that Eddie Dancer put his foot on the front of Harold's chair, and shoved with all his might, and so the chair went flying backward against the wall. And Harold's head hit the wall. I guess in the scale of things, that's—in today's LA Times would certainly indicate that that's not a violent act, but it was certainly a very demeaning thing to do to the vice president of the school, at a time that, theoretically at least, the students were there to meet with us, to try to express what their wishes were and to have some kind of an audience.