

Jason Clark

Class year: 2007

Major: Romance Languages & Literature

Current Profession: Higher Education Administrator



My time at CC was filled with paradoxes for which I am ultimately grateful. The rich educational experiences inside and outside of the classroom were both academically and personally challenging. At times I felt voiceless at CC, yet I learned to advocate for myself. I felt physically separated from my family, rejected by my hometown community for my choice to pursue education, and unwelcomed by my peers for not having the right kind of social, intellectual, and monetary capital. But ultimately, I am who I am because of CC and I would make no changes.

When I first arrived on campus, the idea of being surrounded by other students who were excited about education was invigorating. I grew up in Spanish Harlem in NYC in government housing and spent most of my childhood in foster care -- the odds were certainly against me. Education was the only variable I had to take control of my future and success. However, while I was overcoming odds it seemed that every other CC student was taking advanced placement courses, visiting other countries, starting nonprofit organizations and way ahead of the game. I felt underprepared, broke, and unworthy to contribute my perspective in the classroom.

I am Puerto Rican and Dominican and apparently no one in Colorado, at the time, knew what that meant. Leaving NYC for Colorado Springs in some ways made matters worse but it also gave me better sense of self. I knew I was in trouble when I could not find anyone to cut my thick black curly fro and when I couldn't find rice and beans at Rastall. It may seem funny, but I felt like I didn't exist because the foods I grew up with were not available and I couldn't get my hair cut the way it had looked for years. Even going home for the summer was draining. Because I had some college education, left NYC, lived in Colorado, etc. I was looked at differently by some of my friends, family members and people in my community in general. People assumed I was too good and that I had abandoned them. I was so confused.

However, the distance from my family only drew me closer to my Afro-Latino heritage and also to my community. I had to be more adamant and intentional about preserving and sharing my culture. I lost so many of my CDs at Salsa Nights to get the chance to dance merengue, bachatata

and salsa. Yet I remember being frustrated by questions like, Do you speak Spanish? Are you Mexican? There were also some painful experiences associated with not ever being black enough for BSU or Latino enough for Somos. Nevertheless, I became more passionate about advancing urban and diverse communities; and grew excited to integrate my social and intellectual perspective. Most of the work I do now is associated with empowering communities of color and making sure higher educational institutions do not implement policies and procedures that marginalize and create barriers.

I struggled at CC because I was different, I was not the norm and my culture, perspective, and beliefs were rarely reflected in the student body, campus policies, or in the campus artwork/architecture. When you are called out in class to represent your race in the discussion, or people think that you must be at CC because you play a sport, or assume that you must have a scholarship, its begins to slowly tear you down. Sometime you start to believe in those comments. These feelings are rekindled every time I step foot on campus. But there is hope. The education I received at CC changed my life.

Sure, maybe I became a critical thinker, but I also clawed myself out of poverty and gained a sense of pride in myself that can never be taken away. I used to walk around campus believing the lies of my peers that the only reason I got into CC was because of the color of my skin and compelling story. However, I am proud of the fact that I got into to CC without special test preparation courses or any esteemed public or private high school – heck my high school has been shut down for years due to underperforming scores. I worked extremely hard – while others partied - and earned my degree by myself. I made the dean lists a few times and did this all while working two jobs, volunteering and being super active at my church. I felt exceptionally prepared for graduate school and for navigating the workplace. Every time I mention CC, doors literally open. Even the hard experiences taught me much about myself and empowered me to advocate for myself and others. My current life would be so incredibly different had I not chosen to go to Colorado College and I would not change anything about my experiences. As a CC alumnus of color, I am excited to reconnect with my alma mater, not because those were the best years of my life but because my presence is needed. There is hope after CC for alumni and students of color.