

Interviewer: Please state your name, title, and affiliation.

Dr. Simpson: I'm Andrea Y. Simpson, professor emerita from the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a bit about your personal background, specifically where you are from? What was your home or family life like for you growing up?

Dr. Simpson: I am from Memphis, Tennessee. I'm the fifth of six children. My mother was a third-grade teacher. My father was a postal carrier. And I grew up in in the Jim Crow era of the South. And I attended segregated schools. I graduated from high school in. And that year and the few years afterwards were when they really succeeded in desegregating the schools. They're resegregated now, but for a very short while. We did have a few integrated schools. So, my father was very ill when I was in high school. He got ill when I was in the ninth grade, and he passed away on my class day of my senior year. And so, since he had been ill, I decided not to take seriously any applications to the universities outside of Memphis. So, I ended up going to Rhodes College, as it is known now. Then it was Southwestern in Memphis and proud to say that. Wow. Why am I blanking on her name, the outspoken congressperson from Texas, Crockett, Jasmine Crockett, is an alum of Rhodes College. So that is where I went to undergraduate school. I was an acting major, and right after school, I did a lot of public relations, newscasting, things in that general area, public relations and advertising. And I did that kind of work until many years later when I resigned as spokesperson for the Charlottesville, Virginia school district and decided to go back to school, to grad school.

Interviewer: And how were you introduced to the field of political science?

Dr. Simpson: Well, I grew up in a very political family. My parents watched both conventions every year, Democrat and Republican National conventions. And it was sort of required that we also watch, too. My mother's favorite part was the roll call at the Democratic National Convention. The last convention when they had such an elaborate roll call with a DJ. I said, "I wish my mother were here to see this." She would have gotten a huge kick out of it. So, they were very up on the news. We were required to know the news as well and read the paper. My mother was part of a group of people to help break the E. H. Crump machine in Memphis, which is a very powerful Democratic machine, so powerful that there's actually a blues song called Mr. Crump, don't like it here. So, so she was, she believed in activism and, she, you know, sort of

instilled in all of us. So, there was a lot of political talk around our house all of the time. And so that's how I got introduced to politics as I got older and, chose to major in acting, in advertising, in the creative fields while I enjoyed them, when I got about, I guess, I think I was about or so when I decided that that whole area was unfulfilling for me. So, I started thinking about what do I want to do with my life. So, at the time, there were all these self-help books out. One was called *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Which, you know, you read to sort of discover maybe what you should be doing. I read that book and many others. And one of the suggestions was, think about what you do in your spare time, and that may be the key to what you should do with your life. So, in my spare time, I was always watching CNN, and I knew I liked politics and policy so that that sealed my decision to go back to the university of Virginia and get a master's in public policy. I had dreams of being a policy wonk and having a job in D.C. at some sort of agency and being able to write policies that would help people.

Interviewer: That's phenomenal. And did you go and obtain your PhD as well?

Dr. Simpson: Not at UVA. I got to UVA and I'm matriculating through the program. And then the professors there started calling me in one by one trying to encourage me to go get the PhD or to stay there and get it. And the thing about getting the PhD that troubled me was I wasn't sure that I would be an adequate teacher, and I come from a long line of teachers. My mother was a third-grade teacher. My grandmother was a sixth-grade teacher. My two older sisters were, French and biology, respectively. I was not sure, as they talked about my getting the PhD, whether I'd be any good as a teacher, even though I come from a long line of teachers and its sort of the family business, if you will. but I started thinking about it, and I really was a much better graduate student than I was an undergraduate student. So, I like to tell my undergraduates, just because you haven't made the Dean's list every semester that you've been in school does not mean that you are not smart or you're not intellectual. It just means you haven't found your passion yet. So, but I was a very good student there, and I really enjoyed it. I was shocked at how much I enjoyed reading and researching and writing papers. So as sort of the talk ramped up about my continuing on to get the PhD, I had still not really budged from wanting to be a policy wonk. But here's the thing. All of my colleagues in that program did receive interviews with various governmental agencies. I did not get a single interview with anybody. And so, I took that to be a sign from the universe that perhaps I was not meant to do the thing that I thought I wanted to do. So, I was actually not knowing where I would go from there. And I had an Emory University graduate catalog in my townhouse, and it happened to be lying around, and I picked it up and flipped through. It landed on political science and saw it was a person there who had gone to UVA.

Dr. Simpson: Randall Strahan. I called Randall Strahan and sort of explained my predicament. And I said, I'm really calling you to see if you have any contacts at the Carter Center in Atlanta, because it occurred to me maybe I could work at some sort of nonprofit or a political active entity like the Carter Center. And he said, well, we do have a relationship with the Carter Center. He said, but let me call you back. Meanwhile, he I think he called the University of Virginia, asked about me, and then he called back and said, have you thought about grad school? I said, I've only thought about grad school in terms of the PhD, but not very much. He said, "I think that's what you ought to do. You ought to come here and get a PhD with us. So, I ended up, I was passed the deadline for applications, but somehow, I had one in the house. I must have sent for it earlier, when I was sort of mulling over getting a Ph.D. and I filled out the application. I'll never forget a friend of mine who was a courier for Fedex overnighted it for me, you know, using his discount because Fedex was beyond my means. Then. And, so I got a call from them saying, do you think you could come down and meet us? And I was like, yes, I will come down. I went down to Atlanta in my Honda Prelude with \$ in my pocket. Believe it or not, the Honda Prelude made it from Charlottesville, Virginia to Atlanta on three quarters of a tank of gas.

Dr. Simpson: So, I got there. I stayed with an old friend and her husband, and I mean, the angels must have been watching over me every morning that I got up. Her husband had slipped \$ on my dresser and said, Andrea, I think you need this. And I was like, yes, to get back home, I do it. So, I went over, and I met the professors in the department and, on my way out, I dropped off at the university, right before I was going to hit the road. I ran into the director of graduate studies, and he said, you know what, Andrea? We're going to meet now and decide on the entering class. Call me when you get to Charlottesville and I'll have an answer. So, I did. I get back to Charlottesville probably about, at night, and I was so scared to call out. I remember sitting in my dining room just looking at the phone, and my now husband said, Andrea, make the call. You have to know. So, I made the call and as soon as I saw it, he picked up the phone and said, hello, I said, hello. I said, Doctor Remington, this is Andrea Simpson. He said, ah yes. He said, "Welcome to Emory." So, I got a four-year full ride, not renewable every year, but just a full ride. And that's how I ended up in Emory's PhD program.

Interviewer: That's fantastic.

Dr. Simpson: It is very serendipitous.

Interviewer: And can you tell us a bit more about your graduate school experience?

Dr. Simpson: My graduate school experience was challenging in several areas. One was I was much older than the rest of my cohort. That year. I was. They sort of topped off in the late. I think. And the other part was there was no one in the department who did Black politics, which is what I was interested in. So, although Randall Strahan ended up being my dissertation director, he did not know the literature of the field at all. And one thing I must give him credit for, he made he made an acquaintance with Carol Swain and other Black political scientists at conferences, and he sort of connected me to them to help me out. And so that was very that was very helpful and very wise of him. So, that's when I decided on my dissertation topic and when I had to write a dissertation on, the possibility of Black conservatives coming out of a generation that had been totally integrated and had never experienced Jim Crow. I wrote a book about it called *The Tie That Binds Identity and Political Attitudes in the post -civil rights generation*. So, and and so that was but that was difficult sort of negotiating all that with nobody on the faculty could really guide me in a lot of the seminal works in Black politics. And so age being a woman, wanting to study something that was not the department's forte, they were all challenges. And, I would say I've felt a lot of resistance on the part of some of the professors in terms of supporting me.

Interviewer: And were you a first-generation scholar?

Dr. Simpson: I was a, well, my sister was simultaneously getting her PhD at Ole Miss in educational leadership. She graduated before I did. So, I'm not really the first and I'm not really the second. It was kind of two of us simultaneously doing it, but we were the first family members to enter PhD programs.

Interviewer: Yes. And did you have any mentors along the way that made an impression on you or your career? And if so, who?

Dr. Simpson: Well, Randall Strahan was one of my mentors. And what I learned from Randy is how important it is to be kind, because I did learn the first really hard lesson, and that is academia is not a kind and gentle place is a place that can, it's the kind of profession that can really, damage you, you know, as a person and can really instill a lot of self -doubt. And so, I learned from him that one of the most important things you can do for students is to tell them that they can do it and demonstrate that you believe they can do it. And, to sort of counteract all of the naysayers that are out there, and there are many naysayers still when it comes to African American in academia. I think the stereotypes of Black academics still not being ready for primetime, so to speak. I think that still prevails. So, he helped a lot. Believe it or not, Carol

Swain, the conservative who's retired from Vanderbilt, but at the time, she had just started Princeton. She was responsive to me. I invited her to speak at the Bunch Institute, where I was lead TA in the summers for the Ralph Bunche Institute out of APSA. So, we had all these speakers come in. So, Carol came in, and she was also very helpful to me in my work. Robin D.G. Kelley, the historian, he started his career at Emory in the history department. He became one of the trusted advisors in terms of my intellectual work. So, yes, I had a number of people help me along the way.

Interviewer: And how would you characterize the political social environment in the US while you were in college or graduate school, and or were you involved in social or political activism as a student?

Dr. Simpson: Yes. I was not involved in political and social activism as a student, because I was simply too busy and I had two stepchildren at the time when I first started nine and. They're now and. So, you know, I was dealing with making sure they had, meaningful visits with us, the non-custodial parents. So, I was very busy. So, I was not very active. The most I did was help put together, like, forums and panels on feminism and, you know, various and sundry, you know, unrelated topics. I, you know, lend my services to the professor doing them. But that was the extent of it.

Interviewer: Thank you. And you touched on this a little bit already, but can you tell us about your research trajectory? Such as what was your dissertation topic? What is your current main area of focus? And were there any particular scholars whose work was influential in your thinking and research?

Dr. Simpson: Right. Well, I was really interested in political attitudes and ideologies, simply because African Americans are still the largest voting bloc in the United States. And I found that curious because I thought as things loosen up, is it that we do not have the same political unity we once had? And as Blacks gained access to, you know, more income and living in different communities. Would that shave off a certain percentage of votes for the Democratic Party? I was really curious about that. And so, with my dissertation, I wanted to see if increased income would correlate with increased conservatism. And so, and, and also the relationship with all of that was a Black identity. What it did, what did it mean? And was it still driving the vote? Because my hypothesis was that shared the shared history of slavery, and our shared experiences is the, was the glue holding the voting bloc together. And I was curious as to what might happen if some of that shared experience piece of it was eroded through integration. And so that's where

my dissertation started. And then I picked up the same theme with the book, only I had a data set that I could really use. Michael Dawson's National Black Politics study. He was kind enough to send me the database, which I divided into two cohorts, civil rights and post-civil rights generation, and compared responses, especially on Black identity, which we measured.

Dr. Simpson: I'm not sure we still do, but we measured then by this linked fate theory of dots is that we believe that what happens to other Blacks could happen to us. So it was a series of questions, you know, about how much you feel that what happened to anybody else in your community or say, for example, Rodney King, when you saw that, did you feel like it could it could happen to you or somebody you love. So, that was I separated the data set into those two cohorts. I found out Black identity meant something a little different to the post-civil rights generation. It wasn't so much that they felt like things like that could happen to them. It was more or less that they felt an obligation to help those behind them. So, I discovered this element of, I call it, racial responsibility. I didn't call it that in my book, but that's what I call it now. And so, it wasn't so much of, you know, when I'm defending others, defending myself as much as it was, although I probably will never be in that situation. I know that it's real and I'm a part of this group. And so, I have an obligation to do something about it. So, then I augmented that with interviews with Black college student leaders at HBCUs. And at PWI s or predominantly White institutions. And I found something fascinating. The young Black Republicans that I interviewed at HBCU were also avid followers of Louis Farrakhan, which on its face doesn't make sense because Louis Farrakhan, as far as I was, still is the leader of the, Black Muslims, which I distinguished from, you know, Sunni or Shiite Muslims in this country because is built around, you know, racial uplift and ideology. But the more I explored things through my in -depth interviews with them, the more I realized, well, it's really true that Farrakhan does teach independence from government largess, which is a definitely a Republican idea. You know, don't depend on the government to support you. So, the Nation of Islam, they teach and they support entrepreneurship. They believe in that. They believe in supporting and building community, you know, and trying to limit your economic, you know, interactions with Black-owned businesses, etc, etc.

Dr. Simpson: So when I interviewed, I remember in one interview, a young man said, I find it insulting when Democrats and liberals say things like, you know what we need to keep gyms open and have midnight basketball so that the young people in that will not get in trouble as easy. He said to my ears, I hear this. Let's have midnight basketball so they'll be too tired to come to our neighborhoods and steal our cars. He said, I say this, what about Black S.A.T. prep? What about midnight S.A.T. prep? What about midnight algebra? What about midnight calculus? That's what I want to see. Not midnight basketball. So, it was just real interesting. In addition to being conservative, these young Black Republican men were patriarchal as well. They all made

mention of the fact that their fathers were the sources of their political attitudes and ideologies and that they didn't even talk politics very much with their mothers, which I found fascinating. When I get to Predominantly White Institutions and very few conservative Black students. Because that led me to another finding. Context is everything. When you are outnumbered and at a Predominantly White Institution, your racial identity surges forward when you in an all-Black environment. Then other aspects of yourself can come forward, like your political ideology and your socio-economic class status. All of these other individual traits have a chance to make themselves known. And so, I thought that was interesting in that ideology was also more fungible than you might think. So, if, at an HBCU, I don't feel the need to defend blackness or to establish myself as an authentic Black. You know, that's a given. I'm in an all-Black environment. But if I met in a Predominantly White Institution and one young man said to me like this, he says, look, when I go into class I'm usually the only Black if I'm not and there's another Black person in there, I go and sit right by that person and say, hi, brother, or hi sister. We're going to make it through this together. But, you know, if you're at a, if you're in a majority Black institution, there's no need for that kind of support and solidarity because the entire campus is steeped in Black culture. So, there's no need to push for Black History Month activities or are those other kinds of things. So, I thought that was kind of an important finding that racial identity is not, you know, static. It doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. And I think that was an important thing to discover in terms of what drives political behavior.

Interviewer: That's really fascinating research. Thank you.

Dr. Simpson: We're still sort of wrestling about Black identity is still sort of pushing up against stereotypes about us, you know? The other thing I did with my dissertation was that I got a grant and I was able to get a list of Black households and cities in suburbia throughout the country. And I did a random sample and mail surveys to like seven of its respondents. I think I got back like surveys filled out, which my committee decided was a respectable showing. And one of the things that helped me was my own marketing and PR skills. The post office came out that year with a W.E.B. Dubois stamp and I use that on all of the surveys. And one woman even wrote on the back of a survey, she said, Dear Andrea, I have a feeling you're a graduate student working on your dissertation. She said the Dubois stamp was a dead giveaway. She said, good thinking. She said I was determined to fill this out and send it back. And I was like, it worked. People got it. Because I guess people assume that White people are not going to buy Black heritage stamps. So as soon as they saw Dubois, they sort of got my subliminal message. Help us, sister out. So that's the stuff. And after looking at those surveys, it was really fascinating in terms of both how they responded on the linked fate questions on Black identity. I was surprised to find fewer highly religious people than I thought I would find. And I was also surprised to find sort of more animus towards police departments than I thought I would find. But there was a question in

Dawson's data set this said, do you think of the police as much like a gang just on the other side? I was surprised at the people that responded. Agree or strongly agree that police operated much like street gangs do. So, and that helped me to form sort of a quantitative base. And then when I wrote the book, I added to that qualitative data from members of the post-civil rights generation.

Interviewer: That's fascinating.

Dr. Simpson: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, we're going to shift gears a little bit.

Dr. Simpson: Okay.

Interviewer: What does being a political scientist of color mean to you?

Dr. Simpson: That is really a good question. Okay. Scanning my brain for meaning. Well, since I'm a member of the civil rights generation, I have to say, you know, politics is about power. And so being a member of a minority group with less power than the majority group than I have felt it meant that I was committing myself and obligating myself to point out the power politics that that are racially charged, and to try to write about them, and speak up for, for, you know, for people who don't have a voice. So that's what it kind of meant to me. And then as I grew older and became a professor, it, it, it, expanded to include an obligation to young scholars of color and graduate students. So that's what it's kind of meant to me, is that since I'm a political scientist and I studied power, I should be a voice for pointing out how power works and how and how the powerless can somehow gain some, some agency in the, you know, grand scheme of things. And what challenges, if any, have you faced throughout your career? Either due to your race, gender, or your chosen field of study? All three have been challenging. My first academic job, I was at a lawn party, and I overheard a professor in another department saying to someone, I don't object to Blacks in the professoriate. I just don't think they're ready yet. And I remember in my mind, thinking, I can't interject into this conversation because, you know, it was A and B, and I was C, I was like, but I can't believe people still say stuff like that. They're not ready. How does one get ready, you know, other than getting the PhD for the Professoriate? And so, you know, those attitudes were always under the surface.

Dr. Simpson: So, I remember an incident in which I was really not feeling well. I had horrible allergies in Atlanta, but I was in my graduate seminar anyway. But I probably looked really bad because I felt really bad. And the professor says at some point in the class, Miss Simpson, do you think you're going to live through the class today? And I said, I'm going to do my best. And so, let's fast forward a couple of weeks later. One of my cohorts had been out for several seminars. She was actually quite ill. But, you know, I assume that they knew that she was ill. So, this same professor asked me, because I was the oldest one in the cohort, and everybody knew that all of the young people came to me with every single problem they ever had. And he asked me if I knew what was going on with her. I said, yes, she's very ill. I said, and they don't quite know what's wrong with her, but it was found out it was just anxiety. But the symptoms were terrible. And I remember him asking me, well, are you guys are you taking care of her? Yes. My husband and I are making sure she's okay. He said, well, you know, you can bring her to my house if you need me, my wife and I will look after her. I said, well, that's nice, but I think we've got it under control. But I thought about it later on and that was really I was really upset. So, I went back to him, and I said, you know what? I was really sick a few weeks ago. You embarrassed me by asking me if I would live in class. But now, when I see you with so much concern for, my colleague, I said, this is what occurs to me.

Dr. Simpson: You thought I was malingering. You thought I was pretending to be sick, so I didn't have to participate. I said, and I really need to call you on that because I feel I don't feel good about what's happened, you know, because you had no concern for me at all. And I was clearly ill sitting right in front of you. And shock of all shocks, he said. Oh my God, you're absolutely right. He said, just seeing it the way you put it. You're absolutely right. I didn't believe that you were really very ill. But as soon as you told me that this young White woman was ill, I believed. I believed it immediately. And I was actually, well, disappointed that it happened, but grateful that I finally face someone who was honest and a good enough person to say, wow, you got me. But I don't think he was consciously aware of not believing me. But I tell him, I said this. This is a common stereotype that Black people you know, are malingerers. Now I'm reminded of the slave in *Gone with the Wind*. After saying she could help. Melanie had the baby telling Scarlett, I don't know nothing about birthing no babies. Yeah, because she just did what she does not want to be involved in at whole process. And I said, you know, the typical stereotypical malingering slave is that they could be malingerers. But, you know, but he admitted to probably having those feelings. And so that was, you know, and I really had the utmost respect for him from then on.

Dr. Simpson: And so, yeah, you always had to battle this idea and also the idea that you couldn't do any better. So, because I had allergies, such bad allergy problems, I would try to finish my seminar papers early so I could turn them in and get some feedback and redo them if I was really

off the bar. So, I did this with a professor so that I turned in the final paper and turned to the last page after you gave them back. I saw this long note. Dear Andrea, he said, there are very few people that can answer criticisms. He said, you have answered every suggestion and criticism I made of the previous version. He said, this bodes well for your future as a scholar. And I was very relieved. But also, what is the message in there? The message inside of there is I didn't think you could do any better. I thought you'd already turned in the best you could do in the draft. So, there's also this underlying attitude I ran into a lot that you can't help it, you can't do any better because you're Black. Of course you don't understand, you know? So that was kind of tough. The other part was being older, you know, people who think once you pass, you know, your brain has really slowed up. But let me tell you, they haven't seen a slow brain until they see a year old brain like the one I have now. Okay, I was like a genius then, compared to what I am now. So. But that was just all over. I had a, I had a girlfriend at the University of, Wisconsin, and a professor actually said to her once, you know, the old gray matter, it just ain't what it used to be. And I said, oh, that's all sexist and ageist. I said, you know, this just he just altered the old gray mare ain't what she used to be. I said, so it's both sexist and ageist is a terrible thing to say. But this person was an absolute genius. You know, she died not very long ago, very early. And, but she made full professor before she died. One of five full professors in our field, in the entire country. So. So, you know those attitudes. So, it's ageism. It's racism. Is sexism all rolled into one. You know, and so. Oh, and those of us who are not, you know, petite, you know. Or what do they say? I love this. This new thing is going around demure and mindful. I'm not so demure and mindful. Oh, if you don't fit into that, you know you're a self-indulgent glutton.

Dr. Simpson: You know, I was in the data lab once at Emory, and I was talking about, we were talking about weight loss just in general. And of course, I think it was right after Oprah lost all the weight and then pulled her pounds of fat out on the stage in a wagon, saying, this is how much weight I lost. And so, so we're winding down with the conversation and a and a grad student that was a couple of years ahead of me said, let's face it, Andrea, we're talking about a character flaw, right? We're talking about like, lack of self-control. I was so angry, but I said, don't do it. Don't, you know, don't go all Memphis on him in the data lab. Everybody will find out about it. And all of a sudden you will be too old, too Black, too female, and too ghetto to be in the grad program. So, I sort of I had to what Archie Bunker used to tell his wife, stifle yourself. So, I had to stifle myself. But I knew that that's when I learned, wow, it does matter how people look in the Academy. My mother was so thrilled that I was in grad school that she was like, finally, one of my children will have a career will they'll be judged by their talent and their intellect and not by anything else. Dear mother, I know you're up there. I hope you see you were dead wrong that academicians are just as shallow as the Spice Girls. Yeah. We also are likely to to make judgments about people based on the way they present. So yeah, those were. And they pop up. Oh, this is a really good one.

Dr. Simpson: So, I'm at the University of Washington. I'm the outside, dissertation committee member for young man in sociology who is studying why out, why certain groups of men marry outside of their race and ethnicity and more than others. And of course, you know what he found? Black men married in much higher rates out of the race than other groups of men. And so, he's he's doing a really good job of presenting his work. And when Q&A; comes, one of his committee members said, well, this is one big problem I have in your in your equation. He said, where is the variable of attractiveness? I'm sitting right there and I'm a Black woman and the poor guy, he looked straight at me, and he looked like, oh my God, I want to die right now. And he said he did try to fake it. I'm not sure what you mean. And he said, why didn't you consider that Blacks are marrying outside of their race? Because there are no attractive Black women. And he didn't know what to say. He was like, well, well, I think he said, I think the, the process of choosing a marital partner has to do with much more than maybe he said, because attractiveness or who is attractive is so subjective. And inside I was going, yay! That's a good answer because it's true. You know, if we try to measure who's attractive and who's not. I will wager that there are plenty of people in this country who do not think J.Lo is attractive. I don't care how many people do. There are a few people out there who say, I mean, she's okay, but she's not just great. And so, and the guy kind of tried to persist in it. I mean, could it be, you know, you know, like, you know, their their body shapes and, and their hair and this guy is just shrinking. He's like, please don't take me down this road anymore. But I was so insulted. I wrote a long letter to the Dean about the line of questioning, and I wanted to say, I really, I could be totally wrong, but in that moment I felt he was simply trying to say something to me. Not necessarily a real, genuine question about this young man's work.

Dr. Simpson: And, you know, I was wondering when they were going to ask the question about, well, so what? And what does it mean? You know, but I think what I think and I think it was an important project because if there are enough out marriages and children of those mixed marriages, what does it say for racial categories? I mean, are we going to continue to be able to categorize people in these narrow slots? You know, Black, you know, Latino or Hispanic, White, you know, Pacific Islander? Are we going to continue to try to do that? Are we going to have to come up with more categories or just say, if you have if one of your parents is of a certain way, like we basically do now, then you would just Black legally. So I thought it was an important question, because if we lose the categories and we can't count, how are we going to keep track with inequality? We won't be able to keep track of it. So I thought it was an important question, but there were no questions from his committee along those lines, you know. So I thought that was interesting. In your view, what is necessary in order to further diversify the discipline and make it more equitable and welcoming to scholars of color in the profession? I think the first thing that's needed is for political science to, to get out of longstanding traditions about how they think about, especially U.S. politics, because I have been told by many more than one person that Blacks are an interest group like any other. And, should, you know, that's why they were against

the race, ethnicity and politics section of APSA. They were like, why does it have to be a whole different section? I was like, because we're not just another interest group. We are, a group. We only % of the population, but we are the only group that went through enslavement and just not any kind of enslavement. We're talking chattel slavery, and that's a whole different ballgame from other forms of slavery. So, you know, it's like King said once, all we're asking is America to be true to what she said on paper, that all men are created equal. So this I feel like Black folks remain the crucible of American democracy. If we, as a nation and a people can't get over it and, and have, insatiable appetite for oppression of people of color, then we're not going to ever live up to the democratic ideal.

Interviewer: Building off of that, in addition to the existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programing, what is your advice to associations like the APSA or WPSA on how best to support scholars of color in the profession as they approach milestones in their career, such as dissertation completion, tenure promotion or career advancement?

Dr. Simpson: Well, I think that the programs that have been in place, the ones that I knew about, like the Ralph Bunche Institute from APSA, where we get young, Black and brown students who are still in college who expressed an interest in political science graduate school. They come to the Bunche Institute and sort of get immersed in methods and literature that inform, you know, the politics of race and, and get a chance to think about whether or not they really have something to say, something that they want to say that the discipline is a good vehicle for. I think that, just because there have been executive orders issued, you know, against DEI, and other efforts, I'm not sure everyone should cave to all of them so fast. I mean, you can you might you might say, I don't we don't have a formal DEI. It doesn't mean you still can't do it. I mean, because you do know that we have been excluded from a lot of these circles. So, all you have to do is keep the ethos that we are going to carefully consider scholars from groups that have been underrepresented. You can make that decision and do it without labeling it anything. I do think political scientists, of all people, probably need to start getting really creative with what we call things. We talked about that in the panel this morning. You know, instead of, you know, women in politics or politics and gender is, of course, just a, you know, I don't I can't think of another title right now, but one person said she was going to teach a course on politics and identity. She said and, a little bit afraid of that course as it. Yeah. The title is scary. Why don't you call it the politics of self or the self in relationship to politics?

Dr. Simpson: You know, I said, we're going to have to go to sort of more general sort of names or names that, more inclusive. Oops. I just said a word that's on the list, inclusive. You can't use it even when it's in favor of everybody. So, you know, I think we'll have to be a little sharper and

more creative with how we frame what our agenda is. Because what we're interested in is the production of knowledge. The more we know and understand about all things political, political processes, ideology, history, the better off we are as a nation and as a world. So, that's what I think could happen to me, to be honest. To be perfectly honest, WSA has always been progressive, APSA you know, as has only come a few steps in a very long time because with the popularity of all work that involves women and minorities. If you look at APSA's panels, you still see an overabundance of quantities, studies about electoral politics and institutions, and that all of that stuff is really, really important. Don't get me wrong. But I think there's an overreliance on it. And I think what's at the bottom of it is the science and political science. We're trying to be predictive. And this is my philosophy on that. We'll be doing good. If we can explain what happened yesterday, much less what is going to happen in the future, because I don't think is possible because we're really dealing with people, and people are unpredictable. So, so I think, yeah, this sort of loyalty to that particular motive, inquiry needs to be abandoned because there are lots of ways to acquire knowledge.

Interviewer: Shifting gears again, you've held a number of leadership positions in the profession, including with APSA and WPSA. What, in your view, makes a good leader or what did you learn from these experiences?

Dr. Simpson: Oh boy, did I learn a lot. I think as a leader you have to be really patient, which I must say is program chair of the Western. I had a very good lesson in patience because right before the conference, I want to say a week before the LGBTQ, contingent was threatening not to come to the conference and not to present because we were at the Hyatt in San Diego and the one of the Hyatt owners, or, people most invested in the Hyatt had donated to the proposition on the ballot in California that would, I think, disallow gay marriage, if I recall. Did you? Can anybody remember? What I'm talking about was at prop. What? Yeah. Proposition. And so they were very upset. And so, I panicked at first and got really upset. And wanted to say this. Come on. My friends in the LGBTQ cohort, I'm your friend. Don't don't do the sister like this. Don't not show up in it. The one conference on program chair. Oh, that does it. Okay. Let's breathe. so I discovered the following. The Hyatt was on the land owned by this person. Not actually the person who did the donation. And money was not a principle of the Hyatt in in San Diego. And then we had an and, and I learned to think about how can I lay people's fears because I understand it. They began to say, are we going to really be welcome there? Are we going to be welcomed with our children? So, we had a pre-conference meeting with officials of the Hyatt at that particular location. Only to find out that they honored gay marriage, that they honored, benefits for same sex partners, that both the manager of the hotel and the conference manager were both members of the LGBTQ community. And I was so grateful to just quell all that in a way that didn't upset anybody because, you know, it could have been more contentious than it

was if I hadn't had decided to say, well, what's going on here? And what does this person have to do with the Hyatt itself? And I made that discovery because I thought they were absolutely right at first and they were not. So, I learned to be patient, to have more empathy for the point of view of others.

Dr. Simpson: And, at APSA, the lessons were a little bit different. I sort of did not understand that there were, I say that APSA was more fractionalized than I imagined. And the role of these different factions in determining whose work was spotlighted and whose was not. You know, I always wondered, why do certain people get critics and meet other panels and others don't get it? And so, it's because that they there are sort of power centers within organizations. And to be a good leader, you need to recognize that. And to me, do your very best to mitigate the effects of these special interest groups, shall I say. And so, yeah. So it was, and for the Western, to me, the reason I love the organization so much is to me, it exemplify the best in people in terms of being able to work across ideological lines and racial lines and also being an organization committed to an ethos of let's teach and inspire not slice and dice at our conferences, that young people should come to our conferences and feel like I'm going to get helpful feedback, and I'm not going to get cut down to the point where I want to quit graduate school. So, because it can happen. I went to a conference once where a really prominent scholar was in the bar crying after her panel because she had been really, really humiliated. And when the discussant took over the panel and started to discuss her paper, along with the other papers. In fact, I believe she told me he took her paper, and he was flipping through it, and then he just pull it back on the table and said, you know what? I'm not going to talk any more about this mess or this junk or something like that. And she was mortified. And even if it is junk, you shouldn't do it you know your junk is somebody else's, you know, lighted path to to greater knowledge. So. Yeah. And so, and we have never been this way at the Western. In fact, when I've seen one person sort of, you know, be hypercritical of a grad student, the backlash was, was, was was heavy in the room, as you know, people that were professors looked at this person, you know, like, what are you doing? What are you saying? And then those of us, we began to jump into the fray to defend what was good about the work and where this person was going wrong.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Dr. Simpson: You're so welcome. Thank you for asking me.

Interviewer: And is there anything else you would like to share with us before we conclude the interview?

Dr. Simpson: I would just, the only thing I'd like to add is that I think the world of ideas is everything. It's everything. Everything we do, think and say, how we're governed, how we live in community, it all stems from an idea. And the Academy is the home of the idea of people. And so, we're not just teaching, you know, we're not just, you know, writing and producing new knowledge. We are forming and shaping human beings that will run the world. And I just don't want anybody to lose sight of that. I use that as my motivation to keep going. That, you know, the it is a small world, I know. And academic life is a life that not many people understand unless you're in it or unless you're close to somebody who's in it. But it is very important to keep our higher education institutions independent, free from authoritarianism, and that we were made free to work and to seek and to speak our truths, because there are not always truths that are comfortable, but many times they are truths that we need to hear to create a, I know this sounds trite, better world. But when I say better world, I mean a world in which we don't have homeless people. A world in which everybody who's sick can get help, and then we can justify the wisdom of taking these attitudes in ways that make sense to a lot of people. I think the political scientist is the ones who can look at one and say, yes, you might think that you're wasting money trying to, research like something like diabetes, but guess how much more money you're wasting taking care of people who are in end stage renal disease? I said, we're the ones that make those cost benefit analysis, and we're the ones that can bring history to bear on present circumstances. So, I hope in this very scary age, we can keep in mind the big picture of what our purpose is.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Dr. Simpson: Thank you. I appreciate it. So nice to meet you.