Dr. Aoki: My name is Andy Aoki. I'm a professor of political science at Oxford University.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a bit about your personal background? So specifically, where were you from and what was your family or home life like growing up?

Dr. Aoki: I grew up in Portland, Oregon. I think, you know, in general it was, good experience, but, Portland, was I would say, you know, a relatively racist town. And particularly at that point when I was growing up, the, anti-Japanese racism was was very substantial. It's really a carryover from World War two. So wherever you went, I didn't go expecting it. Wherever you went, you couldn't be surprised if you encountered it. It was, something. It was just part of life. So, for instance, my parents had a small grocery store, and I think it was just routine for most people just to call it the "Jap" store. They knew it was a slur. And so in case I'd meet someone they'd slip into, and you'd see them change the "Jap - oh I mean the..." You'd see what they were going to say. And so that was, just all around, growing up. And then the other thing that wasn't ,part of my life, but but had a big impact was, my family on both sides. My, my mother and father, their families were all incarcerated during World War II. I know some people said my parents never talked about it. And what I say is well, it's possible my mother never talked about before the age of three, because I have no memory of that. But every day since the age of three, I'm quit e sure she's talked about it. My older brother would confirm that if you asked him. So so that that, those experiences, while they weren't mine, were very formative and, she was always quite clear, said that's a tremendous injustice. It was always wrong.

Dr. Aoki: And, and then the other thing, my mother was a big influence. Probably shaped me a lot. She she would say, you know, the history. It's not the entire history. There's a lot of stuff they're not telling. And s o from a young age that was just instilled in me that, you know, you read a history book and it's someone's history, but it's not everyone's history. So. So I think those things really were, formative. And then, you know, encountering. You know, fairly frequently at grade school racist experiences sometimes directed at me, more often my brother, who, to be fair, could be an irritating kind of person. But but, I was I was fairly inoffensive and, but, you know, you just never knew when you'd run into that. There was one year where, at that point, schools were swelling so they built portables. So they're outside, outside of the school building. And, after lunch, you'd come back or I would come back just. Okay, what do I got to deal with? But luckily, I made one good friend, and I would say we would fight off, you know, the future criminals of the world because it would, you know, it would literally, you know, sometimes just have to kind of fight until the teacher got there. But I don't want to make it, you know, sound too grim. I think, you know, overall it was I made some good friends there, lifelong friends. But al so I had experiences which I think in retrospect really shaped kind of the career arch that I've had.

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

Dr. Aoki: That came, really in college. I didn't know what political science was. So when I was, a high school senior applying to colleges, I just kind of a dutiful kid. And so I thought you had to list a major, and it sounded interesting. I had no idea what it was. But then, I took a political science class my first quarter at University of Oregon. And the professor was kind of a dynamic sort. He was, someone who had worked on campaigns. He'd worked on Hubert Humphrey, presidential campaign. He'd been the chair of the state Democratic Party. So, that really introduced me to political science, although it was a very different kind of political science then. Then it's kind of mainstream for the discipline. But on the other hand, I think that also sort of shaped my career arc, because from him, I got the notion that political science is about being involved and, being concerned about policy and, and, not just looking at it from kind of a distant perspective. But that was my introduction. And, it took me a while to figure out what more sort of mainstream political science was about. And where did you attend undergraduate and then graduate school? I did my undergrad at University of Oregon in Eugene, and then I did my grad work at University of Wisconsin -Madison.

Interviewer: And can you tell us a little bit more about your undergraduate and graduate experience there?

Dr. Aoki: Yeah, it was. You know, generally, I think positive. There were big schools, both big schools. And so, you know, there's just a lot going on. You have to kind of find your way. I remember the first time I went to register, took me about or minutes to figure out what was even going on, because back then it wasn't done online, and you had to go to multiple locations and figure things out and kind of figure out what was going to fill first. But but it was, it was a good experience. There wasn't a lot about what would become my professional career, the study of race and ethnicity. So that I just gleaned bits and pieces and the very end, of my undergrad, my senior year, there was a class I had heard about from a friend, on, music, I think it was called, was it called Dylan Springsteen and others or something other like, take this class. But some of the things you read, they talked about the United States in the broader historical perspective and race and issues like that. And I thought, wow, this is really interesting. This is just fascinating. I want to learn more about that. And then in in grad school, I was fortunate, to be able to meet some people who encouraged that. And one person in particular, Dick Murrellman, who, he at the time was one of a few people really pioneering the return to the study of culture and politics. The other one was, Aaron Wildavsky. Wildavsky's approach, I thought was, was much more

simplistic. I t was more influential because it was so simplistic, was easy to use. But Murrellman's was a lot more complex and Wildavsky's never had anything about race. But Murrellman really started looking at that. And I thought, well, if you look at culture and not look at race, that makes no sense. But, Murrellman did and, he was always very generous with his time. And so that, that also, I think really helped helped to set kind of the direction of where I would go in my career.

Interviewer: Were you a first generation scholar?

Dr. Aoki: No. I was a first in my, my, family to go to grad school. But, my parents went the they had what I guess maybe for people of their background would be typical, but, maybe not typical. My mom was the only one in her family to go to college. She was very determined. And so she went at a time when, there wasn't a lot of assistance. I think she got some small scholarship, but she basically worked as a domestic servant for, three years. I think she was a before she discovered there some other opportunities. So, she made it through that. And then my dad, after they were released, I think he enlisted shortly thereafter. And he was like, a lot of men to do was do that and use the GI Bill. But they both had very different kinds of experiences. But, yeah, they both, got their undergrad degrees and then went on to work. And, so I was the first to go to grad school.

Interviewer: Thank you. Did you have any mentors along the way who made an impression on your career?

Dr. Aoki: That political science professor I mentioned, James Klonoski? He, he was kind of charismatic, and he did shape the way of thought about political science. And then, in grad school, there are two people important to me. You mentioned Dick Murrellman. Richard Murrellman who really, just had so many interesting takes on things. But also, h e was he was an astonishing interdisciplinary scholar. And he cross psychology, sociology, anthropology, education. It's it was an impossible, you know, impossible role model to live up to. But but it, introduced me to a lot of things beyond just political science, which is continued interest me to this day. And then, my advisor, Booth-Valor, Robert Booth-Valor was very important because he encouraged me to try different things. I was just telling people, at a panel a few minutes ago when I started what we call REP today wasn't even a thing. People didn't study that. It wasn't considered to be a subfield. But, Booth-Valor, he said, you know, these things interest you. Try them. And because it was no, I'd do it that I didn't really start with that, but I started looking at

culture and politics and, and, he was very open to that. And so those two people between Booth - Valor and Dick Murrellman, who were the main people on my dissertation committee, it allowed me to to explore things that weren't being done very much at the time. And, and, I think with different mentors, my career probably would have been very different.

Interviewer: How would you characterize the political and social environment in the US while you were i n undergrad or graduate school, and were you involved in any social or political activism at that time?

Dr. Aoki: It was an interesting time, in a sense. There was a little bit of a lull in that. Of course, for a while there in the s, there had been a lot of activity over civil rights and over the Vietnam War. And before I got to, college as an undergrad, the Vietnam War had ended. When I got to Madison in particular, there had been, some resonance of that. But in Madison, there'd been a bombing, where a grad student had been killed. And that had a big impact. Obviously, no one intended that. And kind of left people, I think, a little stunned. And so,you know, in some ways, some of that, had died down some of the activism, although there were issues and it was undergrad even, I wouldn't say I got involved in a lot of things. But one issue that that just struck me as so obvious was, issue about fighting apartheid in South Africa and some of the boycott campaigns. And, and that was, something that was getting a lot of attention, University of Oregon, when I was there. And then, of course, continuing on for a while. I was at, at Madison during some of the Reagan years. And so there were some things, particularly my friends were involved in, and they recruited me about, foreign policy protests. So I wouldn't say I was extremely active, but but, you know, issues that came up I and particularly when I had friends, doing that, I got involved with some of those.

Interviewer: And can you tell us more about your research trajectory? So what was your dissertation topic, your current main area of focus, and were there any particular scholars whose work has influenced you throughout your career?

Dr. Aoki: So my research trajectory, it's it's an interesting one. So as I mentioned before, when I started, there really weren't many people doing race and politics. There were a few, but there weren't a lot. And, and I would say most schools didn't have anyone who had that as their specialty. They might be doing bits and pieces, but no one had a specialty. I mentioned as an undergrad I had been exposed to set of culture and politics, which fascinated me. And so I thought I wanted to do something on that. And so I kind of cast about, with encouragement from

Booth -Valor and with, Dick Murrellman kind of moving a little bit in that direction at the time, tha t helped me. And so my dissertation was actually on music and politics, which you find more now, but there were not many people doing it back then. In fact, there might have been one other in political science. So it didn't seem that promising of, a route for a junior faculty member. But, I was interested in culture, and Murrellman had it kind of pioneered the way of connecting that, theoretically with with the study of race. And then what really made a huge difference for me. Later. Well, after grad school. But, founding of the race, ethnicity, and politics section. I was just telling some people how I would wander around APSA and there were interesting things going on, but nothing that really connected with, with my core interests. And then, one day, leafing through the program, we discovered this REP section. I went, attended and thought, wow, this is this is what I've been trying to do. And that, that really, made a difference having meeting colleagues, people with similar interests.

Dr. Aoki: Of course there weren't as many then. It's gotten much bigger now. But, that encouraged me to, to, pursue, the study of culture and politics, but particularly within race and politics more. And then, with some colleagues who we tried to help organize and get more space for, the study of Asian American politics. And so that that kind of, is what, the path I took, I had, out of grad school, I'd got interested in debates over multicultural education. And, when I, start looking at them, I thought that the critics. It doesn't seem that they're so concerned about multicultural education, but it's about race and also about immigration. So I started to look at debates over immigration. And I met some colleagues of some similar interests. And as I say, it's better to be lucky than to be good because as we got into this through, got a lot of interest in immigration. So when we did a book on on immigration, and particularly the way immigration was reshaping racial politics, in the United States, there was just a lot of publisher interest. And, we were just fortunate to be, I think, among the earlier people looking at that. And so I just kept on on that track and then got interested in issues of racialization and Asian Americans, which is what I'm, working on now. There's actually another book I'm finishing with some col leagues, but I'm going to be returning to the issue of racialization ,and Asian -Americans, which has been, the main focus in many ways for the last several years for me. Thank you. And we're going to shift g ears a little bit here.

Interviewer: So what is being a political scientist of color mean to you?

Dr. Aoki: You know, it means different things. Although I have to say, if if we were doing this, let's see, four months ago, it was. It might be different than today, but I it's always meant, you know, things about, representation and perspectives that maybe weren't as widespread. Now, honestly, that I think a lot of that is under attack. It means having to to say more and and I'm in

the somewhat fortunate position. I'm relatively senior in the field. And so there are junior faculty, I think, who are concerned and rightly so. And, and so, I think part of it means you having to, to try and, stand up and be more visible about what's going on. And so I've tried to do that. And there's in fact, on small thing we've been working on trying to to make it clear that some of these efforts to divide people, really, are at least misguided and, and so it's been, being someone who tries to, create space, make space for, for views that that's what my mother told me years ago, were not in the books. They didn't write about them. And so part of my career, I guess, is, and as a scholar of color has been trying to, to address what my mom complained about a lot when when I was young. But, as I was saying it, another thing is just trying to make space for more people, you know, a little like me, and, and a lot of my career has been spent doing that to trying to create more spaces.

Interviewer: What challenges, if any, have you faced throughout your career, either due to your race or chosen field of study?

Dr. Aoki: It gets back to I saying, I don't think there were a lot of spaces for that, and I don't know that it was, due to any kind of overt hostility. It's just people didn't think about the fact that there were a lot of folks who weren't the subjects of not just in political science, but a lot of scholarship, period. And so that that was harder. I don't think it's as hard now. I think it's gotten better. But when I was starting out, you know, people say, well, why are you doing this? Is this needed? And obviously, the glib answer is the fact you're asking the question, I think suggest it is needed. But, but you know, that that's a challenge of if people don't think it's worthwhile scholarship, then you have to work a little bit harder to convince them. And, thanks to a lot of colleagues around the country who have been doing work for many years now, I don't think we face that as much. But that was a challenge. And then, as I mentioned in early on at APSA, there there seem to b e so few people doing this. I would literally be wandering around the conference looking for things that interest me. And then I discovered REP, the section that, that was like a game changer for me.

Interviewer: So in your view, what is necessary in order to further diversify the discipline and make it more equitable for scholars of color?

Dr. Aoki: I think the things that have been happening are good. I keep getting back to the terms of creating more spaces because people, of course, they need to do their work. They they need to to do things that, are, worth reading. But there needs to be the space for that. And, and there's a

structural element to it. You could certainly publish without going to the conferences, but it's a heck of a lot easier if, if you can go to the conferences, if you get feedback, if you can, you know, find people can help you who are maybe a little farther along or maybe at the same point you are, but really interested to work in the same things. And, as I've been saying early on, it didn't feel like there are many of those spaces. And then, they seem to have grown and that that's been through concerted effort. And I think, creating, more and expanding those more is something that can help, can make a meaningful difference. I know it did for me, and different associations, you know, they have different strengths. And so APSA has been kind of the lead association, and they can, be a role model. And they're more resources for things like these interviews, which I think are so valuable at this point in time. We're at the WPSA where we're at right now. As a smaller association, they 're able to do some things that the APSA can't do so well. And so the WPSA, the conference, it pretty much has room for everyone. And the APSA I've been involved in conference planning. So I understand the crunch on room space and I know how you just can't fit everyone. But at the WPSA, it's, a place where really new people, grad students can be sure they ca n find a place. I was just at a panel where there were a few people said, this is my first conference, the first place I presented, and those spaces are so important, one, to help people feel like they belong somewhere. And then also in practical career terms, to find people like be mentors, to find people like, review your work, help you along and, APSA because of its national, reach, the more spaces they can provide, the more they can help. But I know there's a mentor program, other things that have been developed. So I think those kinds of things, you don't see them so much from a distance. But at the ground level, I think they really do make a difference. As I said, I know they've made a difference for me over my career.

Interviewer: So building off of what you're saying right now, in addition to existing diversity, equity and inclusion programing, what is your advice to associations like APSA or WPSA on how to best support scholars of color throughout milestones in their career, like, dissertation completion, tenure and promotion and then their career advancement?

Dr. Aoki: I think what associations like APSA and WPSA have been doing, of helping people make more connections, offering more opportunities for networking that's so valuable. You know, some people are in places are that they might already have a lot of access to that, but as, the populations diversified and you do get more scholars of color, then more and more of them are going to be in smaller places where they may not know anyone. I remember getting an email from, woman who was, at a school in Wisconsin, I don't really know. And, and doing this and I came across your name and so I happened to try to connect with other people. But, you know, doing on your own is hard. Whereas at the APSA or any of the b ig scholarly conferences you have, you have more chance to, you know, to meet a lot more people and to find people of common interests. So the, the more that these kinds of opportunities can be presented, I think is

helpful. And then, well, it's it's not the same. Some of these virtual opportunities are so valuable because of course, it's expensive to travel the lodgings expensive. It's expensive. And the, the virtual pieces, of course, provide a low cost. You know, some cases even free, but at least a low cost opportunity to, to see some of these folks that start making these connections. Because it is hard, I think, to contact someone out of the blue that you that you've never met at all. But at least if you're at a virtual space with them, you can say, oh, you know, I was at the zoom session with you and and you mentioned something that's interesting. And so that that helps people make those connections again, particularly for the people, that smaller schools who might not have the networks that some of the people at the bigger schools have.

Interviewer: Thank you. And you've had a number of leadership positions, including at APSA and WPSA, what in your view, makes a good leader?

Dr. Aoki: I always wonder about it because because first I'll have to say I never thought I was a particularly good leader. I have what I call little brother syndrome. I have an older brother, so I always let him take the lead, and I. I said I was a born administrative assistant. You know, I'm good at helping people out, helping get things done, but. But I think over time, one of the things I think is, is listening. Of course, there are different kind of leadership positions, but for the kind I've held, I think trying to hear a lot of people, because one thing that struck me in, in different leadership positions I've been in is sometimes, folks will say, well, we should do this. It makes so much sense. Let's do it. And, and I, I always warn them, I said, you know, if you listen to other people, some people, they don't see it the same way. There are a lot of different views out there and we have our view. We see it maybe from the inside. So we understand this than other people from the outside might not. And so listening and trying to hear more voices and understanding why people have the perception they do, I think is so important. I know I was, you know, on council at the APSA, and one of the more recent controversy of the conference and sitting in hotels and, and so I was hearing different voices, you know, from the different networks I'm in. And all of them made sense. But they're, you know, clashing and, and, it's hard. There's only so much you can do. And of course, council members are all volunteers, but, but the more you can, you can, listen. And I think just an attitude of realizing that there's a lo t out there you don't know, and, a lot of views that you're not familiar with. I think that that attitude alone is important. And then the other thing I, my approach is not particularly inspirational, but I, I've always tried to help people accomplish goals they want to accomplish. And, that there seems to be some value in that to me of, of, it's good to have your own agenda, I guess, but but also paying attention to other people's agenda, what's important to them and, and how can you help them make that happen. And that's that's been my approach when I've been in these positions.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit more then about your experiences at APSA and WPSA conferences and, any advice for junior scholars attending these conferences coming up?

Dr. Aoki: Yeah, sure. As I mentioned, the early on, it was it was, you know, figuratively wandering in the wilderness. I mean, I met at friends and had good experiences, but it it wasn't a place where I was finding the kind of scholarly connections. And that that beginning began to change. And it has been so valuable for me, finding people I've worked with and, and, I enjoy working with people coauthoring and, and, I've made a lot of initial connections at, conferences. So for junior scholars, I think, trying to connect to these, other people through panels. And of course, there are a lot of other kinds of events you could connect. I think that's so valuable. I didn't really understand that. I think, early on, I went to some of these things, but I didn't understand, you know, how you could really make these kind of connections? And I thin k, as I mentioned, the more opportunities that that the disciplines offer that I think, it really helps for, scholars of color in particular, might not have have that knowledge. But for me, that's that's been so valuable people I've worked with this, book. I'm finishing up with James Lai and Oki Takeda, I met them, I think both of APSA conferences, in fact. Oki, I think came up to me one day and said, are you Professor Aoki? Oh charming, he's using the Japanese pronunciation of my name, but I met him there, and James Lai met him through conference many years ago. And and I think of other people I've worked with Pei-te Lien, who, we've had a lot of productive, things we've done together. You know, I met her years ago when I started, this group, the Asian Pacific American Caucus. I, I always tell people the one good decision make was to recruit Pei - te to help me. And, we have worked together in many ways, but those are all things that came from the connection, the conference that, of course, once you meet people, there's lots of ways these days you can connect But I think having that, personal, contact first is still so valuable, today. And, with people so busy, you know, being able to make that personal contact creates a connection. Which enables you to build on and and to have a lot of really, really, fruitful collaboration.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?

Dr. Aoki: I guess one thing kind of getting back to I started with, I, I really appreciate, you know, the APSA doing this, I always did I, I've watched some of these other ones that people did some a number of them for people I knew, some I didn't know. And you learn so much. But now, I mean literally, you know, now in,I think it's more important than ever. And I really do believe this. Because not only are you helping to to, capture, you know, some history, but you're doing at a time when there is is practically Orwellian effort to wipe that out coming from the highest ranks of the federal government. I mean, that's, it to me was stunning. I couldn't believe when

websites to be taken down. And when they would come back up, they would be scrubbed of reference to the kinds of things we're talking about. So when organizations like APSA, do that, that's more valuable than ever because we need these repositories. Now, obviously things may change and hopefully they will change, but but, when we rely too much on government repositories, they are vulnerable to a change in power and to people who want to just erase the past, to erase that history. So I, I just, think it is more valuable than ever that associations commit the resources. And this is something that, again, I think APSA can do, that some of the smaller, organizations can't because they don't have the resources. They don't have the staff. They don't have the financial resources. So, I'm just very grateful for this, you're doing this in this in this time. And I know you're talking to colleagues who, or, people I met early on in my days and the race, ethnicity and politics section. And and I want to hear what they had to say, because there's there's so much history there that will be lost. If not for for what you're doing to, to preserve that. So I really want to thank all of you for, for doing this.