Dr. Morrison: I'm K.C. Morrison. I'm a professor of political science, and I work in the Jill Bynum School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware.

Interviewer: And can you tell us a bit about your personal background? So specifically, where you're from, what was your home or family life like for you growing up?

Dr. Morrison: Okay. I'm from Mississippi. I was born in rural Mississippi and moved fairly early to urban Mississippi insofar as that existed. My family was the host of the sharecroppers. My father was an entrepreneur. He was a barber, and he had a barbering school teaching other people to do barbering. My mother worked on the plantations. This was the only part of my life. She eventually did nursing jobs as a domestic householder friend.

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

Dr. Morrison: I went to college, and by the time I got there, I had already been involved in global politics in my community in segregated Mississippi. So as an activist, I was always interested in politics. From my point of view, studying political science had something to do with my political activism. It wasn't necessarily true, but that was my religion under those circumstances, and that was how I chose to do political science. And Bridget, you attend the undergraduate and graduate I went to undergraduate school at the Tougaloo College outside of Jackson, Mississippi. It's a small sectarian school associated with a congregational church. And I went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, pursuing a typical science and American studies, and had a certificate in American studies from the University of Ghana.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a bit more about your undergraduate and undergraduate school experiences?

Dr. Morrison: Well, my undergraduate experience and my graduate school experience were both meaningful. Undergraduate school, the small liberal arts college, had a reputation of being associated with the civil rights movement. They spoke at the college a sizable number of words. And the college faculty there were active in the movement. There was a contingent of activists associated with the Student Online Coordinating Committee, or STERC, by the time I arrived at Tougaloo. So, it was a wonderful experience, providing me an opportunity to feed my interest in liberal activism. And during my undergraduate studies, I was a member of the Student Online

Coordinating Committee, and in my study there, I was active in public demonstrations, and I was active in freedom schools, in civil rights rallies, that sort of thing, all over the state.

Dr. Morrison: I went to Africa for the first time just after I graduated from college. I spent the summer going through West and East Africa, from Senegal out to Ethiopia. And then I came back and went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, which was one of the world's great centers for African students. And I pursued comparative politics as a first field at the University of Wisconsin.

Interviewer: How did your experiences in West Africa inform your experiences in graduate school?

Dr. Morrison: It was defining. In all kinds of ways. First of all, to see Africa, a place that, in the imagination of local forces, where I came from, did not exist. And what did exist was not available. And when I arrived at this place, seeing African people in control of their lives, you know, independence had come to most countries. There was this great flowering of democratization, where African people were taking charge of their own lives. It was really defining for me as an African descendant, to see and experience this. And then come to graduate school, where I was involved in a community of African students, who were African descendants. From all over the Americas, it was a large contingent of African students that became a community. For the small number of Black graduate students pursuing political science, it was all of two of us, actually. One was from continental Africa, and I was from Mississippi. It was an extraordinary experience of meeting people from all over the continent who were seriously studying Africa.

Interviewer: That's fascinating and so wonderful to hear. Did you have any mentors along the way that made an impression on you or your career?

Dr. Morrison: Yeah. And the first of them were in grade school. I went from elementary school to my school in totally segregated schools. All of my teachers were Black, and the myth was that they were untrained, that they didn't have the quality of education that gave us a good educational experience as boys and girls. That wasn't my experience. But I went from third grade, which I met manually. There were teachers who were highly skilled and widely attuned to the needs of students in a segregated system, where not only were you learning from what you had, but there was always a disruption of the segregated system where people were operating with a degree of integrity, and

stuff. So, I had extraordinary teachers from any elementary school, wonderful teachers in middle school and high school.

Dr. Morrison: That made me a good writer, a good speaker, and gave me a sense of self-confidence. As an African American, who could succeed, who had an obligation to succeed and to move the community beyond the status of their own lives. And we were on the cusp of school integration at that moment, and we all knew the consequences, you know, in terms of our children. I had meaningful teachers who prepared me for that. And then, when I moved out, when I moved to college, I had an extraordinary contingent of teachers from all over the world. I was greatly influenced by a number of teachers out in the world, the Jews who fled Germany, and the college had a sizable number of professors from the East Coast, from the United States, and it was very flowery. Antigua was known as an oasis, and it truly was that from my experience.

Interviewer: And as you went through undergraduate, through graduate school, did you have any particular mentors that really made an impression on you, or that really influenced you? And if so, who were they?

Dr. Morrison: Well, at the University of Wisconsin, a senior scholar and political scientist, a world-renowned scholar, of the study of Central Africa, a specialist on Congo. And then, as I got to the point of doing my dissertation, I came under the influence of the first African American scholar of Africa. Willard Johnson, who had written on political integration, a subject that was of interest to me. I had chosen a dissertation topic on the Chumpew people in Ghana, how they featured into the new system of government and the strong political power throughout history. And Willard Johnson had written this extraordinary book about the Cameroon Federation when he was interrogating that problem, and it happened by coincidence to be on a panel that was interviewing graduate students who were ready to go off and do field work. And Willard Johnson was on the panel interviewing many of them. It was quite the figure that he was a specialist, I was modeling my work after his, and I didn't know if it was a good thing or a bad thing. It turns out, I got Willard with a grant, and Willard Johnson sought me out to tell me the importance of the work I was doing. And we were found to have a relationship through that part.

Interviewer: That's incredible. How would you characterize the political-social environment in the U.S. while you were in college or in graduate school?

Dr. Morrison: It was a time of great turbulence. Living in Mississippi, which was known as the least redeemed of great facades. There was a great deal of evangelical violence. There was a great deal of effort to destroy the civil rights movement in which I was active. So, my education as a student of political science was always infused with what was going on in the community and public demonstrations between people in voting halls who'd never voted before in their lives, and who were always under threat and pressured retribution. By that point, my family had moved from the farm and were no longer sharecroppers, so they didn't undergo that kind of threat. But many people did.

Dr. Morrison: At the same time, the mechanization was happening on the farms, and sharecroppers were being displaced. So, it was a time of great turbulence. And about two months after I arrived at the University of Wisconsin for graduate school, there were massive demonstrations on the campus, anti-war, anti-right-wing movements, and so on. So, I moved from Tougaloo to a very active Midwestern university in reference to social change. So, it was a time of really great turbulence, but the exploration of the broadest ideas about the influences we could have as students in social change.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can you tell us more about your research throughout graduating? So, what was your dissertation topic? What's your current main area of focus? And you've touched on this already a bit, but were there any other particular scholars whose work was influential in your thinking and research?

Dr. Morrison: Well, I did a dissertation on the political integration of the Asante people into the new state of Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah was one of the nationalist leaders that was very influential. He was a great advocate on me for how he put the question of the importance of Africans taking responsibility as Africans for leadership, for brotherhood and development of their countries, and so on. And it required a unification of people that had not always been unified. Some had the dominant over the others in the country. It was a very strong political kingdom and a predominant over many of the Asante groups in what was now Ghana and is still an invading state. And so, the question was, what is the significance of a former political power like that in entering into this new dispensation of the Asante people who were obviously about to give up some fame to then be a part of this new... new configuration. So, that was what my dissertation was about.

Dr. Morrison: And comparative politics, the rubric on which I did this work was my first field. My second field in Bradford School was U.S. politics. And I was particularly interested in politics and discipline itself. As a southerner, and somebody who' s been active in the civil rights movement, I

saw a natural connection between nationalism all over Africa, African liberation, and the liberation of African descendants in the United States. So, these are the two major fields of inquiry in politics, comparative, and U.S. So, I centered myself in those two fields. It was natural that, in addition to my research work in comparative politics, that I would also do work in U.S. politics; and I focused on this, and I began to do a body of research in both of those fields.

Dr. Morrison: They have now finally come to become full circle for me in the work I'm doing now that unites the entire African world, comprehensible Africa and African descendants of the world. Most of my work now is focused on the group the Race and Democracy Project in the Americas which began as a comparison in racial politics in the United States with the United States and in Brazil, and very quickly expanded all across the Americas, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada; asking questions about the potential for democracy amongst African descendants everywhere. What are the similarities and differences? What are the ways in which these various regions speak to each other in the times and questions they have to resolve to be truly independent and liberated?

Dr. Morrison: In that process, there are significant number of scholars, African descendant scholars, and Africans that are important. Seminal figures were Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton. Black Kilburn, which integrated the African descendant world in the USA and in African people Africa, in a notion of colonization being a theory by which we could explain their conditions, hopes, fears, opportunities, and so on. And so that is a significant work. And then the generation of scholars, African descendant scholars, who seriously studied Africa. Wheeler Johnson, I've already mentioned, was an important you know one of those people. Ruth Hamilton, another sociologist of Africa, who was an important figure in world of African people in Africa, you know, and who was defining for how we thought about the potential for utilization of violence, means of liberation of the consequences of complex consequences that we have in major parts that issue to stop this. It's a... the view that this for part makes us been years. So those are just a few of the people.

Interviewer: That's incredible.

Dr. Morrison: Thank you.

Interviewer: We're going to shift gears a little bit. What does being a Black political scientist mean to you?

Dr. Morrison: It's an important question because for me, as a political scientist, I came to the profession as an activist who was asking, what does this discipline provide for me? What tools does the discipline provide for me that enhances the use of race as an important variable in the study of politics? After all, at the time that my generation came into this, race as a variable, it was not understood to be important by the political science establishment, the dominant political science establishment in the United States, the American Political Science Association, for example. It wasn't an important variable. And for me, as a Black political science scientist, my responsibility was to enhance the prospect of this discipline, that we, as scholars, could focus on the importance of race as a means of explaining something and telling us, showing us, important features for untangling the political process that advanced the participation of African descendants. There were certain implications of that. As African descendants, some White scholars believed we didn't have sufficient discretion to study ourselves. A very famous scholar of Africa, for example, didn't take African American students to training on the trickle-throughs, didn't believe that we had the capacity to study ourselves.

Dr. Morrison: And so as a White political scientist, a part of my responsibility in taking hold of a discipline that was about the role of power in society was to show the way in which race functioned and provide meanings, explanations, directions to lead us to better understandings, a discipline that was more comprehensively to think about all of the factors that related to the distribution of power, who had it, and ways in which you could enthrone the voices of people who didn't have it. The only important function that has arrived in this artist is to do with the passion, dispassion, whatever, a set of words one could use. The Black scholars had the mettle to do those things and more often than not to provide better explanations and clarifying definitions and so on, that could use the field to own our insights.

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

Dr. Morrison: Yeah, well, you know, first, at the time I began to study some of the things the field wasn't really very open, you could count the number of African American scholars who were doing political science on just about two hands. And at the founding of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, this was our community that supported us, mentored us, that first generation of political scientists. I was lucky that at the time I began to pursue the field was the founding of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. I was at that first meeting. I met people like Jewel Prestige, Mike Jones, Mac Jones, people who already had PhDs, May King, who took us under their wings at a time when the American Political Science Association didn't really provide space for us. That was welcoming. That supported the kinds of interests that we had. So,

that was the first problematic. Having the discipline raises passions that were associated with the interests and claims we brought as professionals at studying politics.

Dr. Morrison: And then, of course, I arrived at graduate school as an affirmative action baby. It was a matter of fact actually. It was from my point of view. I was assuming something that was mine. I had every right to be in those spaces and major White research universities. That there was a public policy in society that affirmatively took action to define places for us was something important. It had its own kinds of deficits, however. Black graduate students arriving at graduate school, like all graduate students, were wondering what is this all about? They didn't fully appreciate what we were doing, what was going to happen to us. We didn't know whether we were sufficiently, we met sufficient qualifications to be here. To our surprise, none of the other students knew that either.

Dr. Morrison: The advantage they had, however, is that they were White and they more easily found access to mentors than we did. That was another kind of a deficit. But the small communities of us who arrived at the same time supported each other and were clear about why we were there and determined to take full advantage of the opportunity. I didn't arrive at the University of Wisconsin to be something that ended up in some building or somewhere. I arrived at the University of Wisconsin to take possession of that place. The space that if it was going to work for me, I had to own it in the same way that all of the White students wanted to do it. And that was a real advantage in disabusing ourselves of the dyslexia that we had.

Dr. Morrison: And that was that we faced is to take possession of the place and to make the assumption that we were worthy, we deserved to be there, and more often as qualified as anybody else, and frequently more qualified than anybody else. Supercharged vigilance to maintain the importance of studying race, gender, and class as variables in the political system so that we can continue to try and open the system up, so that voices can be heard. The answer is not limiting voices, cutting off voices. The answer to the conundrum we are in right now is more voice.

Interviewer: Well, in addition to the existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programming, what is your advice to associations like APSA or NCOBPS on how to best support Black scholars in their profession as they approach milestones in their career, such as dissertation completion, tenure, and promotion, or career events?

Dr. Morrison: Yeah. Well, it' s a very important question in this moment because both NCOBPS and the APSA have made efforts to try to open up the profession to these voices. The first important thing is that there should be no diminution of the effort to bring people into the profession. The National Conference of Black Political Scientists is this amazing place, that mentors young scholars giving them both a platform to work out their ideas in a safe space where they are critiqued in a way that allows them to build a world and grow. It is a relatively small setting, the conferences for the organization are not large and one of the reasons why this association is for me the most vital space for nurturing people in the study of race environment where people are nurtured, supported, and encouraged to do this work. We do that in a variety of ways.

Dr. Morrison: The first is in the presentation of papers and the presentation of proposals. And getting wonderful advice from senior scholars and junior scholars who, in a safe space, could say, "You might look at this, you might alter this methodology or this methodology." In giving them leadership responsibility to organize panels, to organize roundtables and discussions where they are able simply to think through important questions that relate to the interest they bring. And social settings to rub shoulders with senior scholars. The association has a scholarship program that helps people to come; faculty members are in groups of their students, in this space, I think all of that work has to continue; this space has to continue to exist; the American Political Science Association has to work diligently, and I think harder it's a much larger association, the annual meetings are not accommodating in that same way. The poster developments, for example, is one of the ways I think the expansion of those who allow students to work out things that are sort of in progress, ideas that are in progress, that it' s perfectly understandable that it happens when you have people who are trying to advance in the profession and so on.

Dr. Morrison: The association has got to expand the means for people to feel comfortable in exposing themselves at the most sessions along of the ways that might be done the other is to continue to make space for young scholars to nurture people who are young in the profession to nurture young people make the development of scholarship and opportunities like that and particularly in making access available to students in historically Black colleges that are not waning in their importance as institutions for the training of young Black political people in the profession and to be engaged in the profession in the and to be engaged in the world and to be engaged in the of their careers and the methodological techniques and so on are all very important. Centering race as a variable we've worked hard to do that, in reference to the journal, for example, on race and ethnicity; but I think still the association has miles to go in privileging the sheer study of race as an important variable that explains things in how power is distributed.

Interviewer: Shifting gears again, you have held a number of leadership positions in the profession, such as former NCOBPS president and former APSA council member. So, what, in your view, makes a good leader?

Dr. Morrison: First, is good common sense; and I mention that because it's so easy in this profession to assume that there are loftier things that make for good leadership than common sense. That something stratospheric in the clouds, mystical, something about political science is more important than common sense, isn't. What common sense gives us is a sensitivity that it gives people for whom we work. It is voices we want to advance in whatever we give in organizing the business of our professional associations as grounded in how come we're in this in the first place to advance and enhance people. The other important piece of leadership is recognizing that there is a very high service component to what we do. A willingness of the profession and getting the best advantage of what organizations can do. I think it's important to be active, producing professional in the field. To be recognized as a good person in the field. And to be a leader in the field. And to be recognized in the field.

Interviewer: Is there anything I may have missed that you would like to share with us today before we wrap up?

Dr. Morrison: I'm delighted to have us doing these where we have the opportunities for political scientists to share to others what it means to work in the field and to make ourselves available for the growth and development of something we think important. The study of power and how it's distributed in the world. And as a Black political scientist, the importance of being engaged at the highest level of that in the profession so that we're always in the mix and lessen the chances that our voices will be heard, our interests will be respected and attended to.