

Interviewer: Can you please state your name, title, and affiliation?

Dr. Moss: Okay. My name is Larry Edward Moss.

Dr. Moss: I used to be Dr. Moss. I am no longer [Dr. Moss]. And what was the last thing? Affiliation? I don't have one.

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

Dr. Moss: Okay. I was born in Birmingham, Alabama. As soon as I figured out where I was, I hit the trail. I grew up in Los Angeles. And you wanted to know how it was? The operative thing for me is that I was always the youngest kid everywhere I went in school. So like, all through middle school, high school, I was always the youngest kid. And I think that had something to do with how I saw the world. Because I was always trying to please a crowd that was older than I was.

Interviewer: Wonderful. And how would you describe your family life growing up?

Dr. Moss: It was interesting in the sense that I grew up with the kind of family where-- give you an example. We were in a car and we were driving somewhere. And I noticed the sun was setting. I said, oh, well, you know, the sun's setting over there in the west. My mother said, that's the east. Now, I know better. But in my family, if my mother says it's setting over there, then that's where it's setting. It was like that. My father used to like to laugh. My mother had a master's degree in library of science. My father was a bus driver. So there's a lot of--and so to a significant extent, my life was organized around a lot of precepts that were put on me by my mother. And my father taught me how to laugh. That's a lot of stuff.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Were you introduced to the field of political science?

Dr. Moss: What it amounts to is this. When I went to college and I was the first Black kid to graduate from this college, and that history and implications for how I did-- when I went in the military, I was the helicopter pilot, Vietnam era. And at one point, because I left for active duty

from California, and the Army evaluated what your rank was based on when you left home—so the fact that I left from California to go to flight school on the east coast, that meant I had rank on a whole lot of people. Now, when I was in the military, there was a lot of things I discovered about the real world that I didn't know. I kind of clorched it. I grew up in Watts. But it was like, when my friends were getting ready to go out and do stuff, they wouldn't let me go. I never knew why. But it was like, I tried to get in that little car. They pushed me out of the car.

Dr. Moss: I didn't know why there were older people in Watts who, when I had conversations with them, kept telling me, you're going to make it out of here. Never really understand it. But once I got in the military, those things sort of became clear. And I got very irritated. When I finished flight school, for instance, the commander of the flight school called me into his office, gave me a map. On that map, they had identified all the places that I could stop to get gas because they didn't want somebody who was Black stopping at these places because it wasn't safe. Now, my irritation is, okay, I appreciate you doing this for me. But what are you doing to stop that practice that people get stopped just because they're Black? So a lot of that had to do with-- now, that gets me to how I got to be in political science.

Dr. Moss: I went to a place called Claremont Men's College. My original major was math. They hired these two German guys. Today, I haven't understood one word they said. So I changed my major. Now, when I got in the military. And in the Army, you had to fly four hours flight time to get flight pay. The trick that I used all the time is I started at this base down in Columbus, Georgia, and fly up to North Carolina, turn around, and go back. That was my four hours. But it flew you right over Atlanta. So I'm really getting attracted to Atlanta because I see it every month, at least once. So I stopped and I went to Atlanta. And I went in. And since I talked to them about math, that was going to be mine. But then, when these guys came in and they're speaking German, I went, this ain't going to work. So I decided I needed to do something else. I went to the registrar's office to change my major.

Interviewer: Now, you mentioned you went to Claremont Men's College for undergraduate.

Dr. Moss: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you transfer to Atlanta for undergrad?

Dr. Moss: No. No. I had my degree from Claremont Men's College. And when I went to Atlanta, Atlanta at that time was a graduate school only. So they had a master's degree. They didn't even have a PhD program at that point. They just had a master's program. So I got in it. How bad could it be? Now, the thing about it is, though, I started hearing things from these guys that made sense to me. And there are a lot of stuff I just let go because it didn't make any sense. These guys started making sense to me. And there's a guy named Mac Jones. He ought to be legendary. Alex Willingham ought to be legendary. I took my PhD exam. Had to be 40 years ago. I'm still thinking about one of the questions that Alex Willingham asked me because it was that provocative. And I like that kind of challenge. I went up. I taught at Howard for two years. When these guys called me and said, would you consider coming back? Hell, yes. Let me pack up my car. I'm on the way back. So that I was involved with Atlanta University both as a student and then subsequently as a faculty member.

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

Dr. Moss: My graduate school experience incorporated a number of things, like number one, it was the opportunity to really do some serious academic work. For instance, if you were into urban politics, one of the things that you would have to deal with because it was the rage in the discipline at that point was this thing about the system. Like demand is created. It's turned into a policy. It's implemented. And then you got satisfaction. Well, that was unsatisfactory to me because I saw what was happening. And then I see what's happening to people that I care about. And it didn't make any sense. Then they came out with this notion about symbolic satisfaction. That's what we get because folks say we're getting problems solved, but they don't. But those were the kind of questions that I had an opportunity to work on.

Dr. Moss: My master's degree, I was interested in--you know, when Black workers would get united and make demands, they had to be articulated in a certain kind of way. And one of the things I noticed is I thought I recognized some tension between the way their demands were being put before the public and the way they saw themselves. One of the things about garbage collecting in Atlanta was it was so awful that every Monday there was an 80% absence rate. So anybody who wanted to could be a garbage man on Sunday-- I mean, on Monday. I went and took the job. And I talked to as many people as I could talk to. And then I had to leave. I just couldn't take any more of it. And so that was sort of my orientation. Now, when I got ready to write my dissertation, it was the late 60s. And if you can think back to those days, that's when we first started getting these Black mayors. The question that I still had was, what's the relationship between the articulation of these needs coming from the folk representing the people and the people? And I ask a lot of folk about the crime thing because every urban place I went to, crime

prevention was a problem. I know in Atlanta, they celebrated having Black police officers. What they didn't say was that the Black police officers couldn't arrest anybody outside of the Black community.

Dr. Moss: But the issue for me really was, okay, how do we articulate the needs of the community through these politicians? And one of the things I discovered is that folk walking around out in the streets were a hell of a lot smarter than we were. Because I'd ask-- one of the questions I asked them are, well, how are these politicians that were elected, how are they addressing the issues that you see? And almost to a fault, they said, the politicians are doing what they do. We don't expect the solution to our problems to come from that kind of politics because that's not what it does. So to a certain extent, they didn't have any expectations. Although every politician that I ever saw running for that mayor position, all of them said, you elect me because I'm going to take care of the police misbehaving thing. All of them said that. But the people in the streets, they voted for them, but they didn't believe that was going to happen. And I went, okay, learn something here about how those-- because you could articulate that demand easier by putting it in a way that other people would buy into.

Dr. Moss: What was your question?

Interviewer: My question was, if you could tell us a bit more about your graduate school experience.

Dr. Moss: The other part of that is, now, I told you that I was the youngest guy everywhere I went. Now I was running for city council, which is a stupid thing to do. But I had some people who dared me. And I wasn't bright enough to know you weren't supposed to do that. Anyway, the day that I announced running for that seat, my former wife announced that she was filing for divorce. I go, oh, this is-- now, see, the interesting thing is getting prepared for the trial that was going to take place. One, I found out condonation didn't mean anything. Condonation is a legal term. It means if you had a legal challenge that you could have rightly made somewhere else and you don't do it then, don't bring it up now. I thought it was going to be easy because I had all of this stuff, including statements from her friends. But you're not going to be able to use any of that. So our next approach was to go, okay, well, you're going to have to find a way to split stuff up. So that's what we were talking about. Now, my former wife antagonized the judge so badly that we walked in there anticipating trying to fight for a portion of what I was going to have to pay for. I ended up with the kids and the house and no payment at all.

Dr. Moss: But see, that's other challenges. It's like people don't understand. I remember my daughter was four at that time. My son was seven. I spent the last-- I spent three of those years in helicopters and I'm in graduate school. So when you ask me about my graduate work and that kind of stuff, it always has to be seen within the context of there's a major part of my life now that's devoted to what you do for the sake of these kids. Now, the reality is that after a while, one of my former students convinced me to interview for a job at a local high school. But he said, no, we need somebody who can set a standard so that when other people come, the folk who are going to make the decision have something to judge them against. What he didn't tell me is that there was a possibility that I would win the seat. And I was not going to take that job. And then I found out how much they pay. I was making three times as much teaching high school-- well, running a program in high school as I was teaching graduate school.

Dr. Moss: But see, all of those issues have to be considered within the context of what do I owe my kids. What do I have to do so that this mistake that I made doesn't impact on their lives? But beyond that, I had a great time at Atlanta University. I did. It was just wonderful there because of the extent to which I could raise questions that were important to me. And I could raise them and articulate them in terms that made sense to me. And there were other people that I found who were out there who thought that graduate school was something different. What I do now, because I told you I'm retired, I still have contacts with maybe 20 or 30 of my former graduate students. And the thing that I like about them is they're all out there doing stuff. If you wanted to find the Black guy who is the leading proponent or reparations in this country, that's one of my former students. And see, they're out doing stuff. And they call me from time to time. And I pretend like I know what the answers are.

Dr. Moss: Sometimes I do. And sometimes you just have to say, okay, well, what do you think about that? But I really enjoyed it because one of the things I discovered is you can't, as an individual, resolve the issues that beset our students. So I really don't like it when I see public policy that denigrates Black kids. And they haven't done a single thing to people. It's like from here, you know what they call that, Cancer Alley. The thing that I keep telling people is Cancer Alley is not a situation where you have petrochemical folk who came and Black people moved in. The Black community was there first. And when you say, okay, I don't even like the proposals that they came up with. They say, well, you know, this company, they have improved their situation by 95%. Yeah, but the safety level is you've got to get it down to 2%. But the reason I raise that is because I can't be doing stuff down here and up in Atlanta and up in North Carolina. So what you have to do is you have to try to generate the idea among younger scholars that you need to get yourself down there and work on problems that you can help folks solve. And if you're not doing that, I really don't care what your degree is. I really don't care about your

book. Some guy stopped me in the airport the other day and started talking about, I don't care about your book. Why do I care about your book?

Dr. Moss: Anyway, what else you got?

Interviewer: So along the way, did you have any mentors that made an impression on you?

Dr. Moss: Mack Jones. Mack Jones. Alex Willingham were the two biggest influences in my academic life. When they called me when I was teaching at Howard and they said, what would you think about? That's all I had. I'm going to get a chance to go down and actually-- because I knew those guys.

Dr. Moss: It was a problem for me in the sense that one of the reasons I was so committed to getting an excellent performance when I did my PhD exam, because these guys were friends of mine. I played basketball with Mack. And I knew that Mack had this thing. Mack had never admitted that he was wrong about stuff. It bothered him. And I remember I was in one of his classes. And there was something he said, and it just didn't strike me right. So I went and researched. I decided, that's wrong. So I went to his office. Mack, I got a different way of looking at this. And he said, tell me what it-- so I told him. And he never admitted he was wrong. But in the next class, he said, you know, Larry got a different interpretation of the thing that we did. Why don't you tell them what you thought? And I went, damn, that's Mack's way. But that's who he was. But Mack never backed down when it came to what we need to do for Black.

Dr. Moss: Mack was the one that did the critique of APSA that I read. I go, yeah, that's right. I'm out. NCOBPS comes, Mack becomes president of NCOBPS. And Alex was-- we used to have conferences and stuff. I used to go to his room all the time, because seeing these other folks, they be drinking, all this stuff. I can remember at 4 o'clock one day, there was a question about when organizing. There were some people who were out there organizing around the principle of Black nationalism. And then there were other people who were out there organizing around Black socialism. And which would be the better tool for us to-- and Alex got so mad at the guy. He threatened to throw the guy out of the window. And fourth floor. I'm throwing the guy out of the window. 4 o'clock. And it's in the middle of the night. I loved it. I loved it. And in a sense, I miss the fact that physically I can't get to all these places I used to go around to. Go.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about your research trajectory? So more specifically, what was your dissertation topic, and what's your current main area of focus?

Dr. Moss: Okay. My master's degree, as I indicated, was a question of the articulation of the need. But this was a small study around the Atlanta sanitation strike. But see, that sparked an interest in me. So I looked at-- and it was almost handed to me, because you keep up with the stuff. And back in the 60s, all of a sudden, everybody's talking about police brutality. At the same time, folk are talking about electing Black political office holders. So the idea of looking at how those issues are articulated by Black office holders just strikes me as being just normal.

Dr. Moss: I tried to do the research. I discovered there's no research on that. So I'm doing an exploratory study, saying, here's the things that we need to study in order to understand it. And one of the joys of my life was when I discovered that there was a student at Emory who was doing a follow-up from what I was doing based on-- I listed 10 things that we need to know about in order to really be conversant on this topic. And it just made me happy that somebody that I didn't know thought enough of that. And the other thing is, my dissertation got published. I don't know how. I didn't ask somebody-- because I called them. I saw this thing that said, y'all publishing my dissertation. And they said, well, this guy sent it in. And apparently, somebody just decided that they'd gone send my dissertation in. But I love that kind of communication with folks. I love to sit down and talk with people about, what do you think about that? Because nobody can do that by themselves. I laugh at folks who say they're going to put some stuff together that will allow us to solve all the myriad problems that Black people have all over the country at one time. Anyway, so that's the answer to that question. What else you got?

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

Dr. Moss: Nothing. Oh, you want me to elaborate on that? It doesn't. Let me do it this way. When I was at the high school, Atlanta Public School, one of the things I discovered is that all the other things that we do to Black kids is we allow them to believe that they don't have the same kind of intellectual fiber that other folk have. So this explains why you're living in the worst housing and all those other kind of things. So I decided I'm going to put a debate, because Atlanta-- Georgia has a very active debate program throughout the state. But folk, like in my school, never heard of it before. So we put that together. And I take them to places like-- there's a prep school in Atlanta that has a waiting list of 800 kids.

Dr. Moss: To get in there, it's very exclusive. It costs a whole ton of money. I take them over there. And I know that my kids are walking around and going, is this a high school? Oh, yeah. But see, once we got into the competition, they began to understand, we can compete with these folk. And that was my purpose. So let me show these kids that you can do any-- now, the other thing about that is I don't accept any excuses. Don't tell me about racism. This is America. You intend to live in this place. You're going to have to live in that context. So we have to learn how to succeed in that context. So the whole issue of using my position to somehow begin to convince these folk that they had options beyond those, that people held for them, that was just wonderful for me. And one of the things is I have a tendency these days to forget folk. And they walk up to me thinking, like, this is somebody I knew 20 years ago, and I'm supposed to remember who you are.

Dr. Moss: Who are you? But it's just terrific for me when I find out two things. One, that they have succeeded in life, and two, that they succeeded in a way that allows them to reach back and help somebody else. Because if you can't tell me what you're doing to help my folk, I don't want to care about the rest of it. So you've got a big car. So what?

Dr. Moss: What was your question?

Interviewer: Well, I wanted to ask you--

Dr. Moss: That's your fault for asking somebody who's 80 years old to remember. Go ahead.

Interviewer: I wanted to ask you as well, what challenges, if any, have you faced throughout your career, either perhaps due to your race or your chosen field of study?

Dr. Moss: The biggest thing was always timing for me. When I got the job teaching at Atlanta Public School-- and probably that's my fault. I had this ego thing. And when I got custody of my kids, I kept hearing people who were, you know, a man that they-- hey, you shouldn't have custody of the kids because my daughter was four years old and my son was seven. So part of it had to do with me finding a way to address those issues that were related to that. Because I was not going to have my kids talked about the way I had heard some kids talked about. So that was part of it.

Dr. Moss: One of my favorite couples, and they're coming down to Atlanta today. Both the girl and the guy have been chairmen of the political science department at University of North Carolina in Asheville, at a separate time. And the thing I like about it is when both of them were the chair, they hired their spouse. And I just like the way they work. And I see a lot of positive stuff growing out of that community, because they are there. They were selected-- well, he was selected, and he selected her to do some work for the county, and came up with a \$5 million reparations bill. Now, there are other questions that evolve. There are a lot of older Black folk, all of who want a part of that. And I'm telling them, what you need to do, just think about a way you can take that money and incorporate it in the community. Put a community center up. Teach kids how to play music, how to write plays, how to do art, how to do all that kind of stuff, so that it's not funneled into one or two old people who are going to die in the next 10 years anyway.

Dr. Moss: So there are a lot of issues like that. Just seeing some people that I really care about, and knowing that they're buying into a set of assumptions that are not going to work for them, but knowing that you can't make it easier for them, because they're going to have to do it on their own anyway. They just have to find out. I'll be here to pat you on the head and say, yeah, I understand that. But yeah, that would be the case. My interests now really allow me to get involved in some-- it's like the cancer alley thing. See, I don't have to work that into what I'm trying to teach somebody now. What I can do is look at the data and pull it. I pull up the stuff that the UN wrote. I love the way the UN did it. They said the people who live over there are part of the savage legacy, because the people who are doing that know they're going to die. This is the UN. And the EPA put some really decent stuff in before folks told them to shut up.

Dr. Moss: But there's a lot of stuff that you can get that I have access to now, and I don't have to worry about putting this down because I've got to teach something or other. So it gives you a lot more flexibility. And as to what my aspirations are, I guess what it amounts to is trying to get to the place where I can share with my former students what I know for sure now, because I've discovered that I can't challenge everybody. Because people talk about the influence of all of this money on our contemporary politics. What they don't talk about is Black politicians have-- somebody got to give money to their campaigns, too. And if there's some guy who's out there prepared to give a Black politician \$100,000, you think he won't take that. And see, all of that has implications. And I think we-- I just want to see the case where folk who are walking around now are as insightful as those folk who that I interviewed for my dissertation who said, well, yeah, I know what they say, but we know. It's the we know part that I'm hoping to try to influence in some sort of way.

Interviewer: 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? Okay, that's all of what we've been talking about.

Dr. Moss: One is I think we need to understand that this is a joint venture here. I get tired of listening to how, oh, he's so bright. I don't care about how bright you think you are. I don't care how bright the discipline thinks you are. Folk don't know this, but right before I ran for president of NCOBPS, I told people in my room, I ain't coming back here no more. And the reason I wasn't doing that is because I didn't like the way NCOBPS was going. There was a guy that I taught with at Howard. And I listened to his presentation. You know how they do the panel and then they have somebody make a comment. When it came time for me to make his comments, I said, that's a pile of sh*t. And I'm embarrassed that we work together. And after it was over, he came over and he said, you know, you're right. I said, this was something you would do at APSA, right? He said, yeah. I said, it wouldn't bother me if you did it at APSA, because we aren't focusing on the same people anyway. But as a group, we can't tolerate that kind of stuff. Our scholarship has got to be tight.

Dr. Moss: Our stuff has to be impeccable, because the challenges are going to be greater and the targets that we have are greater. So there's stuff that we have to do. So I just think it's the idea that we have to understand that Black scholars can't simply be paper and pen scholars. As far as I'm concerned, if the stuff that you put down paper and pen doesn't do something, then I don't care about what you put paper and pen. Show me and see if you're a scholar, that's going to work out anyway. Because what happens is, how do we know that the stuff you did on the paper and pen stuff was the correct way to go? The only way we can know that, put it into action and see what happened. So I tried that and it worked. Fine, let's go with that.

Dr. Moss: So I really think there needs to be a sense in which, as a community, we understand, number one, we can't afford to simply be paper and pen scholars. And the other thing is that we need to address those issues that many of us grew up with. Now, everybody didn't grow up with this stuff. But I could take you and go and show you-- in every major city I've been in, I could go and show you where there are people where kids are growing up who don't have a chance. It used to bother me. When I was teaching at Howard, I used to go play basketball with some of these guys. And I read the data and it said, of every five, one of those kids, one of them going to get arrested. And it showed out on the basketball court. And it made me feel limited because there was nothing I could do about that. Well, as a community, we need to come together. And address those things because the kids deserve better. Does that make any sense? Yes. Thank you for that.

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

Dr. Moss: One of the things I learned when I was president of NCOBPS is that there are times where you can't bend an organization to do what you want them to do. One of the reasons I was leaving NCOBPS when I was was because I got tired of people who were trying to use NCOBPS as a way to step up to something different. But the reality is, if a guy is trying to be a-- a woman is trying to be a political scientist, they operate within a specific context. And there are things that they need within that context. And you have to respect that because that's part of how they put this stuff together. So as an organization, you have to accept the fact that they're going to be those things. Everything can't be balls to the wall. We're going out there and have the revolution tonight. It doesn't work that way.

Dr. Moss: So I don't have a real problem with that now. I don't have the problem now that I had then. I would have never talked to my partner like I did. Because what he was doing is he worked hard to get what he had done. But sometimes you just have to sit down and take a breath. He knew that what he was writing was a piece of junk. But he was doing it for NCOBPS, for APSA. And I didn't care what NCOBPS-- what they did over there anywhere. I just hated to use-- lose his skills as a tactician to that. But the reality is everybody got to figure out what you need so that you can be useful to us. Because if you wear yourself out-- and I've seen some people do that. I've seen some people just literally go crazy. And if that's what happens, then you're not going to be helpful to that 11, 12, 13-year-old who needs somebody to talk to.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Dr. Moss: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Shifting gears again. You've held a number of leadership positions in the profession, including as past president of NCOBPS. So what, in your view, makes a good leader? Or what did you learn from these experiences?

Dr. Moss: Okay. Everything that I just said in the last question. But a lot of it had to do with being patient, understanding that things don't change overnight just because you wanted to. Understanding that there are issues that people have to work out. But it's like the folk in North Carolina, I got them together. Because I had-- one of my courses was a traveling course when I was doing it, because I believed that reading stuff out of books is not going to get you what you need if you're going to be an urban political scientist, because stuff changes too quick. So I take them out there and sit them down with the people making the decisions. Then we study those decisions. Well, I had a course. We took kids to New York, Philadelphia. Anyway, I'm not going to remember all of them. But there were eight different cities. Now, the two of them, when we started out to trip, both of them were going with somebody else. But see, I saw them working stuff out. And they used to always sit in the back of the car. And before we got there, I said, y'all are doing something, aren't you? No, Dr. Moss. They've been married now for 30 years. Very prosperous. You're really working hard. Folk respect them. And I just love those kinds of stories.

Dr. Moss: So I think if you're going to be a leader, you have to anticipate things that folk in your group need. It's like that guy that I jumped on because he gave that crappy paper. I should not have done that because I'm looking at what he's doing from my agenda. And what I should have been doing is looking at it from what he was trying to do, understanding what he was going to have to get done in order to be able to-- you know what I mean? So to a certain extent, I think when you're young, you have a tendency to be engaging in a way that's going to put some people off that could be very useful to you later on because people develop at different stages. And you have to take that into consideration. But the thing that I really would like to see us get away from is that extent to which these become sort of elections for president that the idea-- see, my idea of when I became president of the end, because first thing I did is we're going to have the next conference in Mississippi.

Dr. Moss: Well, see, our folk got used to having them. They'd been in Philadelphia. They'd been in Atlanta. They'd been in New York, all of these places where you go do your little paper and then you get out in the street. I knew some of the guys in Mississippi. And I knew they were working hard. And they were fighting for stuff. They had voting issues they need to deal with. Yeah, we're going to Mississippi. I think you have to kind of nudge people toward that position where they understand that, yeah, I understand you got stuff you want to do. But as an organization, we need to be addressing these issues that we as an organization can address for those folks, a sort of nexus between what the folk in the community are doing and trying to do and what we're able to do. Right now, there are a lot of guys-- it's not any official thing. But there are folks I know who some people will call me. I got this problem. I can give you a number. Go call them. And y'all call me back in three months. Let me know what's going on, that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Dr. Moss: You're welcome.

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

Dr. Moss: No. I've done too much already.

Interviewer: This concludes our interview.

Dr. Moss: Thank you, ma'am.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Dr. Moss: Thank you for having me.