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An Interview with Stephanie Singer

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Stephanie Singer, PhD, an elections and government data expert, delivered the keynote lecture, "Democracy: Your Path to Power," at GREAT Day 2019.

Why did you agree to be keynote speaker?

Well, it's quite prestigious and it pays well, [laughs]. When it's not too mercenary, I have a lot of things to say, and I love to have an audience that wants to hear them. I was very excited to talk, especially to a college audience, because I used to be a college professor myself and I really miss the energy.

You've done a lot of things in your life, and you spoke about them in your keynote. Why did you decide to discuss democracy and power at GREAT Day?

Democracy and power has been the theme of my work for over a decade. My actual paid work is a small corner of that, because that's where my skills are most valuable. I have technical skills so I work on the technical part of it, but it's a theme that is in everyone's life. I tried to say what might be most useful for people to learn.

You spoke from the heart and were clearly passionate about the subject. Do you think that personal drive is important in everything you do?

There are a lot of different ways to live, right? Almost everyone has passion. For some people it's quiet, for some people it's about personal things like friendships, family, and it stops in the home. There's nothing wrong with that, but when you can find work and ways to spend your days doing something you're passionate about, it's a great way to live.

I think that's a big part of what makes GREAT Day what it is. So what was your experience like at GREAT Day?

It's amazing! It was so fun, and it was more than that. It was really lovely to feel recognized for what I've done, because I don't always feel that way. It was an honor. I was quite nervous, and I was so flummoxed by having the microphone in both hands. It was such a gorgeous day and I met so many lovely, interesting, connected people.

How do you think your talk went over, did you feel the level of engagement was what you wanted?

I think so. It's so hard to tell. When you're talking to a group, if it's dead you can tell, this was not a dead group. So definitely people were engaged and they asked really interesting questions afterwards. They even laughed occasionally, so that was good! The audience was really good.

For events like these there is often a keynote speaker, what purpose do you think a keynote speech serves on days like GREAT Day?

To wake you up after lunch. Well, what's the purpose of a day like GREAT Day? From the college's point of view, they want to connect all the students and faculty emotion-ally to the college. They want a community, and part of that community is common experiences. Like how do you go from freshman year when you first meet people and there's a sort of discomfort to being a friend? I think it's common experiences that hit you both emotionally. You organize things to do with people you don't have a connec-tion to yet, but if you go through something (major or minor) together, those are the kinds of things that connect you. GREAT Day is actually pretty diffuse, you have all these posters and even if you go to the same poster session you're looking at different posters from other people, you go to different presentation sessions. So the keynote is the unifying moment.