

As the Twig is Bent

It's an old saying, but perhaps you have heard it: *As the twig is bent, the tree shall grow.*

In my own life experiences on this earth, I have observed that axiom to be true. But let me share one dramatic example of it.

Ruth Simmons was chosen to lead two prestigious American universities during her long career in education:

1. In 1995, Simmons became the first African-American woman to head a major college or university when she was selected as president of Smith College, a private liberal arts college for women located in Northampton, Massachusetts, which she led until 2001.
2. She left Smith in 2001 to become the 18th president of Brown University, becoming the first black president of an Ivy League institution. In 2011, Simmons announced she would step down from the Brown presidency at the end of the academic year, June 2012, with a plan to continue at Brown as professor of Comparative Literature and Africana Studies.



How did she get those two important jobs?

Simmons was born on July 3, 1945, in Grapeland, Texas, the last of 12 children of Fanny and Isaac Stubblefield. Her father was a sharecropper, until the family moved to Houston during her school years. Her paternal grandfather descended partly from Benza and Kota people, slaves from Gabon, a sovereign state on the west coast of Central Africa.

It would seem that the odds were stacked against Simmons. But she told one of her classmates that one day she would be the president of a college. Most success stories begin with the parents; in her case, the emphasis is on her mother. Mrs. Stubblefield stressed the importance of having character and moral fiber and valuing “certain things with regard to the treatment of human beings.”

As a result, Simmons said she “worked hard at everything I did, but I didn’t work hard because I was interested in good grades ... or because I was looking for praise or enrichment, but because that is what I was taught.”

(more)

The selection committee at Smith emphasized that Simmons wasn't selected because she was an African-American woman. Peter Rose, a member of the search committee, said, "We wanted to cast the widest possible net for the best possible person. It was the strength of this woman. Her very strong academic performance. The force of her personality."

Remember: As the twig is bent ...

As we wisely choose our dreams, grow in our career choices, and develop our talents, these traits all have a bearing on the successes we achieve.

And, as in the case of Ruth Simmons, the wisdom of her mother to have character and moral fiber and to value the treatment of human beings provides the foundation upon which it is all built.

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely (Proverbs 10:9 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter