

WAG 20211029_Chesley James..mp4

Conan Louis [00:00:03] My name is Conan Louis, Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics 1973, Graduate School '78, and Georgetown University Law Center 1986. Today's date is October 29th, 2021, and I have the distinct privilege of interviewing Dr. James Chesley, a graduate of the Georgetown College Class of 1975. And he probably won't do this, so I'll say it. President of the Jesuit Honor Society, captain of the football team and the deliverer of the Cohonguroton speech, someone of whom we in the Georgetown Black community are extremely proud. Dr. Chesley, thank you for giving us some time today and I'll let you know that in today's interview, I'd like to get your perspectives in seven sort of broad areas. One, your life before Georgetown and sort of what drew you to Georgetown? What got you there? Your academic experience at Georgetown; Campus Life; life in D.C. while you were a student here, your experience as a standout athlete, as captain of the football team, your perspective of your experience as a black man at Georgetown, and how you view the lasting impact of your Georgetown experience. So let me start by asking, where are you originally from and what did you dream your future would be like as a child?

James Chesley [00:01:55] I'm actually from a segregated part of southern Maryland, Charles County, Little Town called Pomonkey, and I grew up in segregation, you know, back in the 50s, and for a long time it was just my parents and myself. And then my sister came along almost a decade later, seven years later, and she actually ended up going to Georgetown and graduated from there also and in her own rights is doing quite well. But as a kid growing up, always wanted to be a doctor, and it came about in in a really ridiculous kind of way. It became a thing of I was about two, two and a half years old, went to a country doctor that was the only doctor in the area down there, and he didn't discriminate. He saw blacks, whites, yellows, greens, purple, whoever came in and took care of them. And it was really neat. And I can remember when I was a little kid, three or four years of age telling him, you know, I'm going to be a doctor one day and give you a shot. And ridiculous kind of thing. Then I got to be a little bit older and my next door neighbor across the road, Mr. Groton, got sick one day and couldn't get an ambulance to take him to the hospital because it was segregation. My father picked him up, had me in the back seat so I could call out things and put him in the car and took him to the hospital. And I can remember vividly him being in the back seat, and I hear this coughing and this, this shaking. And at the time, I didn't know what it was and my father said oh gosh, that's a death rattle. Well, now as a physician, I know that was congestive heart failure, and he had just drowned in his own fluid, and that's what happened to him. And it was something that could have been treated. And we got him to the hospital and unfortunately, Mr. Groton passed, but it left very vivid memories in my life for how things were. And you know, from that point on, you know, I just said, yeah, I'm going to be a doctor. That's all I ever wanted to be. Never want to be anything else, ever. And I said I wanted to Ccme back and be in my community and do that, and skipping over a lot of stuff, got to do that and actually come back and actually took care of that first physician who took care of me. Is that right. Yeah. And did home visits with him and met his daughters and so forth. His wife had passed, but, and took care of him in his few final days, and he and I would laugh and he actually remembered (he was about ninety-something by then) and remembered me. And said "yeah, you were that little kid." And it was just a great warm feeling to have with doing that. So, that's sort of the background of how I grew up and how I got into wanting to be a doctor, and coming up through segregation and all, you know, it was an interesting time for me. It wasn't the things that people think of it was alot of things tha you learned to do and avoid doing and so forth. Well I had sports and from there went to a miliary academy, Charlotte Hall Military Academy, and when I got there, there were three other blacks, two

who had been there and a guy who came in when I came in at eighth grade year and we were the only four in a cadet squadron of about 260 cadets. And so for me, it wasn't anything different. I'd come from segregation and so now it was just I was now living with a whole bunch of white people and they had to live with a couple of black people. And that's the way it was. Now, obviously, the two black guys that were older, 11th and 12th grade were roommates, and this guy and I came and we're both in eighth grade. We were roommates and there was a colonel there who was named Colonel Southern, and little did I know he had put it out there. Hey, look, these black kids are not to be harassed and molested. And so we got treated as badly as everybody else. So we we had all the KP duties and everything else, but. So that's how things came up in it and that was my my coming up and things. And so when I got ready to graduate, I did very, very well there academically and athletically. And so I was the first African-American to be battalion commander there, which is a rank that you're given and be in charge of a whole place and I graduated is a full colonel. And so at that time. Was saying, OK, military academy so I thought the Air Force Academy, so I'll go in there get a full ride, be a physician and, you know, go from there. Well, little did I know with the Vietnam War going on and they said, Yeah, you can have an appointment, but you got to do four years in the military active duty before you can go to medical school. And, you know, having seen what went on back at that time period. And a neighbor in my segregated community came back in a pine box, literally. It was a cigar box and that's the only thing he had stepped on a land mine over in Vietnam. And I looked at that and my dad served in the military. He had been in the army and he'd been overseas and was back during segregation. Things were pretty bad for black soldiers back then. And I'd heard stories from him about things. And I listened to that and I thought about that said, No, I don't think I'm going to be doing this. So I did not take an appointment to the Naval Academy or to the Air Force Academy or to West Point. So I turned all those down, I said nah, and my mother's the reason I came to Georgetown, and I'm not sure if we can keep going on from there or not. But she's the reason why, because she had said, you know, she'd gone to Bowie so African-American college I was gonna go to Howard and end the the person down there in charge of us at the military academy said, No, you know, you know, he's shown a lot of academic promise here. He's shown athletic stuff. He wants to be a physician. I think he should go to Georgetown. And she said, Georgetown? He says, Yeah, I think he can get in. And from there, she brought me up there for a weekend to see the school when they introduced you to prospective candidates and filled out the application sent in their SAT scores and all blah blah blah blah. And next thing you know, I was accepted and that's where I was going, and that's how I got to Georgetown. I had no say in anything. I just what you told me to do, I did. I was a military kid, you know, from a military school, what they said is what went. So that's that's how I ended up at Georgetown.

Conan Louis [00:08:09] Well you actually anticipated the next question, which was why Georgetown? How did you get to Georgetown? Just go. You're at Georgetown now and you're obviously in the college because you're headed toward medical school since this is something you wanted to do since you can remember. What did you major in and how did you find your your academic life at Georgetown?

James Chesley [00:08:32] Once again, you know, everything for me in life has been, you know, fortuitous and belief in God and some guiding light over me taking care of me and I did very well get it at the military academy and when I got to Georgetown, said I wanted to be a doctor, so you want to be a pre-Med and declare major. Well, one of the people at the military academy was a captain Koursnik, and he taught all the science courses and chemistry was one of those courses that I took and I did very well in it. And I like really like chemistry and I said "shoot, I want to be a chemistry major," not knowing have you lost

your mind? So, you know, I was, you know, coming from a school where there were only a few African-Americans and some at Georgetown and seen by, you know, pretty much what I expected. I came up there during the summer because I lived in Charles County, just driving around to see the school one day and found out there was something called the community scholars. And it was all these African-Americans and I saw all these black kids and I said "wait a minute!" And my eyes got big and I was like, whoa. And then I saw all these black women, which military schools like a kid 18 like this is the kid in a candy shop. What? So I go to a guy named Frank Glascon, who standing on the side an older guy, said, "Hey, look, what's this?" He said, a Community Scholars. He says, Who are you? I said James Chesley. He looked at a list. He says, James you're not on the list. I said doesn't surprise me. I said, What's the list? And that's why he said, You know, you have to be invited to this. And I said, Well, can I invite myself? He says well no, you know, there are stipends in this. I said well, you know I don't want anything. I just to be a part of, you know, here. I got to make some of the best friends, even lifelong friends getting through that program. So I sort of dropped in on the Community Scholars program, got accepted by everybody there, never got a dime for anything, and there was stipends and so forth. What have you? But I got to take classes and be with things, and so I met there Dr. Early, who taught a little pre chemistry program to the African-American students that some of the community scholars and I did very well. And he says, You really know chemistry and I really liked him. He's a nice guy. You know, you remind me of Kevin Koursnik, and I say I did make the right decision being a chemistry major. Still, not knowing what I was getting into. That's how I declared a chemistry major. And so when I got there, you know, and everyone tells a story, went to Baker's Chemistry and 625 of us would be in the big lecture hall. And after the first exam, there were only 118 of us left. And in my chemistry thing, there were literally 18 chemistry majors, of which I was the only African-American. There were two others who were going to be in there, but one young lady unfortunately got sick, and another African-American guy ended up not staying at Georgetown, so they both left after about well, the guy left after about two weeks and the young lady got sick and left after about six or eight weeks. So then there were 14 of us chemistry majors of which I was only African-American. And so there I was. And here we were. And I made great friends with them, too. And it was. It was intense. It was a it was a great ride.

Conan Louis [00:11:26] That's great. So you kind of alluded to this somewhat, but tell me how you found the culture in the college and at Georgetown generally.

James Chesley [00:11:37] Now, you know, I didn't realize what I was getting into at all because, like I say, I was told to come to Georgetown, so I didn't realize that, OK, we came in with the largest African-American class that Georgetown had brought in. And we more than doubled the entire African-American population of the entire university, graduate schools and everything combined. And so for me, coming from a little school where there were hardly any blacks in it, you know, a lot of white kids. I was in heaven. I didn't realize that, you know, shoot this is great. There were some of the best friends I ever made. There were the most intelligent African-American ladies that I could meet some of the smartest African-American guys I could meet, great athletes. Great everything. Some of the young ladies there were in cheerleading and it was truly an athletic thing. The way they did Cheerleading. It wasn't what, you know, coming from a military academy, had you know what I know? And it's like, Wow, they're athletes. They can flip, jump. I mean, the stuff they were doing was phenomenal. Then I met some of these guys, some of these track guys from New York whom, you know, you know, Bruce, I'm like, Oh, these guys smoke. I mean, I thought I could run these guys. I mean, it's just like, for me, this was a great cultural awakening and embracing because, you know, it was like being back in my

segregation in an integrated place because I had a whole bunch of friends. We had an African-American community. We had something called the Black House back then 3619 O Street. We could get together on the weekends and have fun play cards and just talk. But then I was still in with my milieu of all my buddies that who were white, that were some of my best buddies I ever met in the Chemistry department. They're my best buddies again to this day. One of the chemistry majors lives like ten minutes from me and because he got 10 kids, so he really kept the jazz with the cat. And we're just really good buddies and we stayed friends and in our chemistry niche. So for me, it was a very different experience. Then the couple that were playing football. You know, I met a guy there named Reggie Terrell. God rest his soul, who was also in the Community Scholars program, and he's we met and we talked. He says, Yeah, I'm going out for football. And I said, I'm going out for fooball. He said You are? I said, Yeah, I am. He and I went out as freshmen and made the football team. So Reggie and I were buddies for all those years. Yeah. And there were other people that were there. But then I had all these other buddies who became brothers, also on the football team. And we were a band of brothers. I had a guy who with all four years of me in the backfield, Billy Sherry, and we're buddies to this day. We just had a Zoom meeting with the football team. The other day we got together. And so for me, it was a very different cultural experience that wasn't lacking in any of the respects because of what, you know, I had no expectations. You know, I didn't. And all of a sudden had my African-American friends who are my best friends that I could have ever imagined and are to this day. Then I had all these white friends that I met that I would never have known could have been so close and such a kindred. And we helped each other through the chemistry stuff, through the madness. And it was just a great fun, and it was why it was a great experience. Yeah, it wasn't all fun and games. There were some things. There were some times of tribulations, you know, couple that, you know, professors, especially my chemistry professor fund out I was playing football and says, You know, this is Georgetown. This is chemistry. This is serious. And he was a British professor and Dr Pope, and he wasn't by any means unfair. He just laid it out on the line. And he says, I expect, everything from you as everybody else. There's nothing you get as an athlete. You miss something because you've got a game. Too bad. So he laid it out there. So it wasn't a negative thing for me was just like, Hey, this is in your face. You do it put up or shut up. And then I had other professors there, Eamon O'Reilly, who was an athlete. He was attracted to me. He had run the marathon. And so he was very, very energetic with me doing this because because he is my Calculus professor and he was like, Yeah, if you're going to work hard and do it, you can pull it off. And if I needed some tutoring, I could go to him. Luckily, I didn't have to because I had my buddies, you know, I had Mike and Joe and and Ed and these guys were in the wars with me, and so we're all in it together. And so it was fun. And then, you know, you went on, you met and a couple of professors in sophomore year. Dr. Stokes, he had a son who played basketball there later on. But at the time, he gave me a fair shake. I'm taking Calculus three and four, which is like kicking my butt. He says well, you know, you might want to try doing this and this and and study this and, you know, do that. And so put in extra time, extra work, you know, so people were like that. It wasn't until my senior year that I had really negative experiences where I had a professor who in the chemistry department couldn't believe I had made it through all these years and had done well because I'd done pretty well in the chemistry department. And a lot of people knew me and the professor who first put it in my face where you know you've you've proved that you alright and that was a good thing. He let you know just like he was in your face about not being good. He was in your face about, Hey, you did all right. This guy had a. He's just a little different kind of person ever met a Georgetown. He was never warm and friendly or fuzzy, but he also wasn't at all trying to be helpful. You know, he had a course that I don't want to call any names or anything, go out ther there, but he he was. Well, you get it the best way you can. That was pretty much noticed you, know it's ok. Go

play your sports. So I realize, OK, let me stay away from this guy, you know, and just do what I do. And I got a B out that course and said, OK, let me keep moving, stay out of his way. You know, I said it could have been a D. You know, C is fine, senior year, my last semester, I'm getting the heck out of here. No problem. So it worked out. I didn't have a lot of the negative experiences a lot of people have I've heard about as I come back to the campus and for alumni and listen to a lot of younger students. But I think it was because because I had low expectations. You know, if you got Peanut,

Conan Louis [00:17:31] Well, I think you're being a little modest there. I think it also helps to be an academic superstar. Oh, speaking of which, so you sort of alluded to, you know, what might have been a somewhat of a negative academic experience? But tell me about, you know, what was your favorite class or professor and why?

James Chesley [00:17:50] Yeah. That's a tough one, I had a lot of really, really fun professors, I had an English professor in my freshman year who just made English fun. I'm thinking why. He was telling me, You know, you sure you want to be a science major. You do it. You write really well, you're doing. You sure you don't want to. And I and he was fun and so forth. Dr. Earley was probably the warmest, most important person in terms of how I felt about people as a person and not only as a scientist and as a professor because he actually taught, you know, a lot of professors will lecture to you, but he actually taught. So that was probably, you know, one of the one of the great things. Eamon O'Reilly was just a good person because he understood the athlete's experience there. Professor, you know,

Conan Louis [00:18:37] I as as you know, I was a track athlete and Eamon. I had the stupidity of trying to work out with him one day. Not a good idea. You probably know he won the Boston Marathon.

James Chesley [00:18:51] He won a marathon, right? One of the first Georgetown? Yeah, exactly. I mean, just in a really nice person. I mean, a good guy, you know, like I say, nobody gave me any breaks in terms of the academics. But he was encouraging that, Hey, if you want to do that and you study, you can you can do both. Just you say, just keep your nose to the grindstone. Professor Stokes, like I say, you know that I know years later he would have a son come in and play basketball, but he was, you know, somebody said, Yeah, look, you got it. You got an away game, get an exam. You leave it on Friday says you won't take the exam early. You can come here and take it early, says I can't let you take it when you come back Monday because you know, the exam would have been out, but you can take it early. He let me come in seven o'clock that morning. I took the exam, got on a bus at nine o'clock and was gone, came back and found, Hey, I didn't do bad. Got a ninety-three, OK. You know, it was those kind of things that made things great. Then I had a Dr. Marteri who taught physical chemistry. Man, that test, whew! That course was one of the toughest courses ever, but he made it fun because he was, you know, just one of those kind of people. But the most fun thing I did there, probably outside of, you know, playing sports and being with on African-American basketball team. The way I went, there was a lot of fun. But our chemistry professors challenged us to a basketball game. The chemistry professors got together and played us in a basketball game, which was mostly our Class of '75, so we had a bunch of athletes and like I say, my buddy Miike Girard, you know, and I were, you know, actually athletes. And Joe Battaglia was was was, was tall and good and playing basketball and Ed Doolen was a rower who was playing. And we just had a great, great time. It was fun. And then ad a bunch of other guys that came in and playing the professors down there in McDonough Gymnasium. We just pick up game and playing. So I had great times and a lot of fun times. But yeah, I guess those those

would be it. And I guess Professor Earley still stands out as, you know, just a really warm, great person, you know? All the boys were great, too. I mean, they were all all good times.

Conan Louis [00:20:57] So it sounds like you felt like you were prepared for graduation.

James Chesley [00:21:02] Well, yeah, you know, and I must admit for me, it also made it very easily because I was going to go to medical school. And so, you know, they had a ranking system there, Georgetown in the premed department and you got, you know, one to five and you got a five, you know, you get top ranking for them, writing you good recommendations. Recommended. Highly recommended. Very recommend. And it almost guaranteed you had a position at Georgetown to go to medical school, which is one of the great things about Georgetown. And it had a medical school. None of these things was I prepared for planning? Some would think, well, he planned thi all out. I wish I could take credit for something like that, but it didn't. But so then for most people, that would be like Georgetown, a safety net school? Naw. But for me, it was like, OK, I got this high ranking Georgetown's going to let me in. I had done research over the summers at Georgetown and in a community program that was there, run by Dr. Arthur Hoyt. And so I had done a research paper and written actually and gotten published as a pre-med student on a on a paper. So, you know, it was a big deal. And I had been doing these during the summers, so it gave me a big comeuppance in terms of, OK, I can apply to other places and see what else you know where I might be able to go. I didn't mention because I didn't do it, but Howard ha offered me in my sophomore year to come to medical school there after my sophomore year and do the MD PhD program where I would go ahead and get the M.D., get my B.S. degree and stay at Howard. And going into a PhD if I wanted to would basically go to medical school. But I didn't. You know, being from the background I'm from, make sure you get a degree because if you don't make it through medical school and punch out, you don't have a degree and you don't have a job. So I said, no I'm finishing at Georgetown. Plus I was loving georgetown. I was playing football. I was having the best time of my life. I met. I mean, I met some of the young ladies there that were just fantastic young ladies that that were just smart, intelligent African-American women who, you know, like I say, coming from a military school from eighth grade on, I never even saw women. There was just nothing. So this was like, Man, these are smart. These are some smart people. I mean, and that was it was just to be an auto. Listen it how intelligently were the conversations they carried on? You know, it was just wonderful. In addition, it wasn't great, wasn't bad. They were awfully good looking to me. And that was that made it nice, too. But so, yeah, for me to go for medical school, it was a thing that, OK, you know, I've got these things. So I said, OK, I'm thinking, What's my dream school? University of Penn? OK, probably not going to get in, but you're going to try. OK. So I was going to do that and then. I just was one of those things again. Stanford had somebody come interview students in the area, and one of the students that came to interview me had been a student at Howard and had gone there as one of the first African-Americans going into the Stanford's medical program, and he interviewed me and looked at things. He looked at my scores and you know, you have to take these MCATs and all this stuff and all. And you know, I'm not one who believes in all these standardized tests, but you got to do them. So he said, Look, you know, we think you might want to come out here to Stanford. I'm thinking in West Coast, come out there? well, first of all, I can't afford I have no money, I said you know my parents took out a loan for me to come here to Georgetown. I was able to be fortunate enough to become an R.A. which paid for room and board my my junior and senior year. It was able to take a big load off. I said, You know, I'm barely getting money from gas my car to drive to Philly for an interview for Med shcool. He says No, no. We'll pay for round-trip plane ticket. He says we'll find a place for you to stay with another student while you're there, you may sleep on the couch or something. But you know we'll

find a place for you. And come on for the interviews, it's just just come see it. And Conan that's how it happened. I said, OK, you know, at that time, I'd gotten a scholar, athlete, all-American award for football. And you know, I'd gotten a couple of those little awards and things. And I said, OK, and then the March of Dimes thing. I said, Well, you know what let me go on out there and see it. I flew out there. And they set me up. They picked me up at the airport with this drop dead gorgeous African-American young lady. She picks me up, brings me to campus and we come down something called Palm Drive, Palm Drive. If you ever get a chance to just do it or just take a picture, just, you know. Now you can. Google Street View was gorgeous. Georgetown, I love it. You know, we're a concrete campus. It was a lot smaller, a lot less the way it is now. We have more greenery then and they have now, but still couldn't believe it. There were palm trees. The sun was shining. Thanks. It was like manna from heaven. What where am I? I thought I was in paradise. After that all of a sudden? The appointments to Harvard, I didn't apply to Yale University of Penn and all the other stuff and just turned them all in to Georgetown I said, now here's where I'm going that I wrote from that weekend when they accepted me and I turned everything else down. And that's how I got to go to Stanford. It was, it was just me. Was amazing.

Conan Louis [00:25:55] Outstanding. So let's finish the academic story. I believe you did your residency at Hopkins.

James Chesley [00:26:02] Right after I left Stanford, I followed the same guy, turns out, who interviewed me. He actually ended up going to Hopkins, and I didn't know that. But you know, when you finished in med school, you look for an internship. And I was going in internal medicine. And so what I did is I finished early at Stanford and then worked on the the AIDS ward up there at the San Francisco General, which was a hospital in San Francisco. Stanford's in Palo Alto. So it's a little drive to go up there and I learned a lot of stuff, but, you know, getting friends all together. But I did externships. I came back, you know, because I got a love for Georgetown. I mean, I got to admit I just really loved Georgetown. So I thought maybe I could make it do my internship and residency at Georgetown. So I did an externship in, you know, at Georgetown, and then I did one at Hopkins and you know I was going around went down to Emory, and I came there and got to Hopkins. And for whatever reason, because, you know, they didn't have a great reputation for African-Americans in the city, in the hospital or with the residents. But I got there and things clicked. I was once again the only African-American, and it was a bunch of other kids. But, you know, the white kids were like, Well, OK, we heard the Stanford students only had academics. They couldn't do anything with their hands, but then stuff, so I could put an IVs, intubate, all that kind of stuff that was important to people back then. And it just worked out. And when they offered me a slot, that's where I took places back in East Coast, back to come back home and nothing being like back back home. So yeah, so that's that's how I ended up at Hopkins. All right, cool. And that was planned.

Conan Louis [00:27:39] All right. So let's go back to campus life now. Where did you live on campus and what were the living accommodations like?

James Chesley [00:27:47] Yeah, the first year I was in New North with a guy named Bob Lipscomb. You know, they hooked up with whomever, you know, whatever. And we got the book. I don't know if they didn't know who I was or what, but the picture of me in the freshman book is not me. Somebody else it is have no idea who the person is. So when I walked into the room, Bob was like, This ain't the guy's name on the picture here. Who is this? Bob and I got along famously in New North, and we were roommates the whole year. He was a philosophy like Jean-Paul Sartre, you know, reading that kind of stuff. Me. I'm playing sports, going out and doing science, doing chemistry. And so we're like the odd

couple and nobody could get it. Like, you know, it was a guy named Dawley who was another African-American on the floor. Ed and I were the only two African-Americans, you know, is, you know, a lot of the white guys we all got along. It was great fun. If there were any people that were bigoted or racist, they stayed away from us because we didn't know we just had a good time and it was good. The second year I was in New South. Bob and I had hit the lottery system. He and I got along so well. Now you get to pick your roommate. I chose each other. We stayed roommates together and we got in a lottery. We got a room in New South, and that's where we were. Then, because I'm looking at funds and money and I was working, you know, I was doing, you know, going to work. And I had a job down at the National Zoo, taking a bus, going down there with a lady named Carol Lutchman. She was also working and we'd go down there and back and forth, and she's just another wonderful, wonderful person. And I realize I got to do something. So I applied for an R.A. position and I got it from my junior senior year and I was back to Old North South. So I lived in Old North. And yeah, we didn't have air conditioning. All the niceties of all the place with Harbin and what have you, which is Harbin was a dream place back in Harbin Hall, but it was great. I got room and board the first year I was with another guy, a dental student. He was a graduate student. He was a dentist going to be a dentist. And he and I were R.A.s on that floor together. The next year, he did not stay as an R.A. and he was graduating, and so I was an R.A. by myself and had a whole room to myself. So that's how I live. I went from New North to New South to Old North for the last two years and it was always on campus and loved being an R.A. I met a lot of young students like freshmen who I still stay in touch with. One of the guys is actually a physician in Maryland now and still laughs about me putting him in on a bus, taking him down. We go down to K Street and have our Sundays once a month and have dinner at one of the All You Can Eats. Everybody gets away together and we would go do that. So it was great and it was great fun.

Conan Louis [00:30:19] What do you remember about the dining or eating facilities on campus?

James Chesley [00:30:24] See, once again, I know in the Barents Sea, and that's why I've always been out there by myself. I come from a military school. When I got there and saw the food down there, I thought I died and gone to heaven. I thank my mother. People couldn't believe it. I was having seconds. I remember Carol Townsend when they said, You want this? Hey, bring it right here. I remember I was eating anything and everything. Like, you like this food? Because come in. Remember now? At my first year, the oldest was an eighth grader. I went in there. I was a private. My whole first year for breakfast every day I had peanut butter and jelly with milk poured over the bread to eat because by the time the eggs and the bacon and sausage got down to me, all the other officers had taken it. Because you had a sergeant in charge of the table, you had the two corporals, then you had the PFCs. And then it was me at the end. Now I got to be a ninth grade. I got to eat because, you know, I had gotten a stripe, you know, so I'm up. So, you know, you get a little bit better. But I was nicer to people. I made sure that I got an egg, at least. But I digress. But no. So yeah, for me, I got to admit I did not have any problem with food. I chowed down. I came in at a lean 153 pounds, five seven hundred fifty three and I left there at five, eight and 192. And my fighting weight as they say, as I was listed in the program was 188. So, you know, I put on thirty five pounds and grew an inch and I was happy as could be. And, you know, I didn't mind hitting the linebackers fullbackers and backs coming out. It didn't matter.

Conan Louis [00:31:56] Yeah, that thirty five pounds of muscle too to wasn't?

James Chesley [00:32:01] All gone. All gone.

Conan Louis [00:32:02] I remember. I remember trying to guard you on the basketball court. Going up for a rebound it was like I hit a brick wall.

James Chesley [00:32:12] I'll play it all having fun. They got that good tact. But yeah, I loved it.

Conan Louis [00:32:18] So we know you played football. What other activities were you involved in as an undergrad?

James Chesley [00:32:26] Yeah, that was that was the good thing, you know, we had the Community Scholars program was fine, but we went on to have our Black House and we got together in the programs in all the REC program. So we had the basketball team and we had our group in tennis. And, you know, it was just always playing a sport back in those days, we didn't have spring training for football, so I was still able to do other things in spring. It wasn't until my senior year or so that we started having spring training and because I had so many labs, most of spring training stuff I couldn't even get to at the time everybody else did. So for me, it was it was a great, great time. I played all the sports, you know, I played with the basketball team, the BSA team, you know, Black Student Alliance had team and we actually won the Championship and we still had that little Cup and award that we won that year. Don Horton was coach as you were playing, we all. It was just a great time. So played the basketball after football season and then the springtime actually didn't play a lot of baseball. I usually played tennis, and that's why, you know, I did the same thing when I got to Stanford and other than Stanford, got to play water polo because they had pools and pots. I got to do that. I think because I was a lifeguard when I in my younger days back in the early, early times.

Conan Louis [00:33:45] So were there events that were going on in the wider world that you can remember vividly or that you feel have felt impacted by?

James Chesley [00:33:57] Unfortunately, I was so busy studying, that's one one of the regrets and things I didn't do that, you know, encouraged my kids to do when they went to college is to enjoy the city, get out, do things. The few times I got, I was with Bruce and Reggie. We go down, went down to American University for a party or something, but basically wasn't really aware what the greater white community was doing, what was happening, what was going on, you know, because I was so used to to racism. This year was Mecca because most people treated me like another human being and as an equal, things were going on outside of the walls of Georgetown. I really wasn't privy to because I basically was studying or playing football. And then when I wasn't, I was still only really studying or being an R.A. doing things. Now we did take a Sunday outings. I would get the guys together because I just thought it was a fun thing to do, and it built camaraderie for the for the floor. And we would go down to one of the steak houses down in and and back in those days, I guess nobody knew about. You should really be a vegetarian and all this and you know, they said we were chowing down and everything. There wasn't a lot of animosity. There wasn't a lot of problems that went on. If there was, you know, back in those days, like I say, you know. I was built pretty good and and it didn't take any stuff, I had an attitude that, you know, maybe too cocky, but it didn't take any stuff. So I never had any problems with anybody big small in between. It didn't matter to me, you know, because you know, you figure you hit somebody 6'2", 250 pounds from the Line. What if somebody else comes up? You don't really care. So didn't have any of those kind of physical confrontations. And so like, as you know, we put on those BSA, you know, those

concerts down there, had War down there at McDonough. But the things going on in the outside world with things happening that was going on, that that impacted. I just wasn't aware enough to it to have it have bothered me or impact me. I was focused on studies and Georgetown required a lot of studying. I was in library everyLauinger Library every night from 7 to 12 and that was my routine. The only time I took off was on Friday nights when we had an away game; if we were home I was there Friday nights and I took off Saturday. I took off Saturday. Every week there was my downtime to go to a party, go to the Black House, just have a good time. So Saturday was only day I took off all the time, but all the other times did that. And the good thing for us is, you know, it also kept me spiritually grounded because every Sunday night, 11:15 in Dahlgren Chapel we had a mass. Fr. King gave a mass every night so nice that you could go steady, unwind and then come back, go to mass shower in bed and be of your eight o'clock chemistry class because that's how you know. So I had a routine and that routine came from my military training, you know, and Charlotte Hall, we had a routine. You got up, you would be taps reveille, whatever it was. And when you had a routine. So as a result, a lot of things that I should have been aware of that should have been privy to and should have been more worldly about, I wasn't. And that's that's the reason why.

Conan Louis [00:36:53] Well, obviously it was the right right way to go. So along the same lines, do you remember any visitors to campus who you know, caught your interest or any speakers or anything like that?

James Chesley [00:37:12] Not the things that that people would be proud of me saying, but I'm going to say it anyway. For me, it was more the social stuff. So when we had Peaches and Herb, when we had Ashford and Simpson, you know, when Ashford, Simpson came that time and you got to meet them. It was like, Wow, you know, these are the people you're here, you see, and so forth. We had War down there. You know, these are bigger than life things for me. But in terms of saying, Oh, you know, I remember this speaker, you know this this year, there were a lot of a lot of world speakers who came. We had a lot of the very impressive people the School of Foreign Service come down to the Hall of Nations that big globe listening to things. But I got to be honest, they weren't the memorable things for me. It was the other stuff, the social things that were more memorable and I just had a different bit on things, and then other folks did.

Conan Louis [00:38:02] What about your impression of Georgetown in the neighborhood?

James Chesley [00:38:10] You know, I just thought it was a really rich, clean, safe place that was devoid of anything else in the rest of the real city. I had family that were there in D.C., in Southeast and so forth, so I knew what the real city was like. I'd been chased through the parks with my older cousins, playing a basketball game and beating these guys and the guys being pissed and chasing you and coming with them it's called Mary Bethune Park. They've changed the name such now, but those kind of things. So it was called Lincoln Park. So, you know, I knew that this was not the real world. I made no bones about that. But I enjoyed the world that this was. And, you know, it wasn't until my senior year when I came back from a party over in Roslyn and I came back because back then the clubs were open until 2:00 a.m. and I got back about 2:15 and coming across the bridge and I had something called the Red Lady, it was my maroon with a white top Pontiac Catalina 1969 1971. Remember, like yesterday, first car only car and I got out and there had been a robbery in Georgetown and I pulled up and couldn't believe it was a parking spot on 37th and O, you'd never get a parking spot there. I pulled in wheeled in park. And as I'm getting out, police cars come up O St. Now wait a minute, O Street's one way. What's going on? And then they come around that little bend right there in front of a

gate and the lights are blaring and I'm right there. What the Heck's going on and I'm getting out and it's "Get on the hood!" and I realize these are police and I get thrown on the hood of the car and the real world came back real quickly as to what's going on and what's happening. And I just played it cool, put my hands up because I said, You know, here I am, you know, I got a big Natural. I got a huge afro back then. And you know, I admit, I was pretty cut pretty well because, you know, I'd stay in shape. You know, it was in the spring of '75, you know, and I'm thinking, OK, I'm going to Stanford for medical school will get this done. These guys, you know, and they're slamming me down here and you just you just played it cool. And then, you know, I was there probably about 20 minutes seemed like three hours, but it's always only about 20 minutes till they check everything pop. The trunk looked me. No drugs, no nothing. No this no that. And I didn't know what they were looking for. They never told me or anything. Never said anything. And I found the next day somebody had robbed somebody, it was a black guy. He was five foot 11. He was dark skinned. I was five eight light-skinned. He had facial hair. I just had a little light mustache and goatee. And I had a big natural. He had no, he had a bald head. But I realized, you know, the real world is still there and it's still always going to be here. And it was a nice awakening because nothing bad came of it. But it always remember, Hey, like my father, we said, you black first for anything else. And that's why my hair's never gotten big for stuff because the first thing they see is that and then other stuff may come after that if you're lucky. But no. So but I didn't have a lot of the outside influences from Georgetown bother me because, like I say, my family that had moved from in the country up to D.C. lived in Southeast and 111 13th Street, SE is where my Nana lived and where I used to go every Christmas. Go visit her. And then my other ones were over there, down there by the park where they used to have the cookouts and the free summer concerts, you know, Nash Place and so forth. So yes, it was no surprise to me that, you know, hey, we're in Mecca. And I enjoyed it.

Conan Louis [00:41:41] So did you did you actually venture out into the city?

James Chesley [00:41:44] Much of the, you know, the army and you do. Actually, I just didn't have enough time. I didn't have any money, obviously. But what I did when I worked, I used to catch the bus and get into DuPont Circle and transfer from there to go up to Connecticut Avenue to go to the zoo. That was really my excursion is seeing people there on the bus and so forth. And Carol was a real tiny little lady. And so she would stick with me and people think on this cute little girlfriend, you got there, you know? And I was not going to say she wasn't buddy and announced then that was never gonna be that lucky. But. And so that's how I got to see the city. What little of the city I saw. And then, like I say, once or twice, went to a party. But basically, didn't you know, the biggest thing, I guess, is when I got written up in the post that time, you know, that was when I actually went to a couple of parties because I got personal invitations. Hey, come to this party, we say, and one of which can we meet you? And you know, and but I didn't really avail myself of the city is and that's one of the regrets. And that's one of the things that I emphasized to my kids. My son went to school in D.C. there, and I told him, I said, Hey, take advantage of the city. It's a wonderful place. My daughter went to another city, I said, Make sure you do the social things. I said, you don't have to work like I did to work, you know? And you know, because that's what it was doing. I was studying, working and playing, playing ball. And so I didn't I didn't avail myself of all the resources that the city had to offer. That's one of the regrets, one that I regret, but that's one of the things that I should have done.

Conan Louis [00:43:10] So because I think a little bit about that post right up. What was that about?

James Chesley [00:43:14] Yeah, you know, I had a real good game against Manhattan, and I intercepted the ball and set the school record that stood for almost thirty five years before it got broken, with the longest interception return for a touchdown 80 yards. Wow. And then I had a second one and that was thirty some yards, and it was the thing that broke Manhattan's back. And at the end they said it seemed my Chesley was receiving more than his receivers were. And the Post had, it was a really, really complementary write up. And they said Georgetown's Dr. C has a life game plan. And that sort of was one of those things that, you know, people got to know you for like man, OK, you know, so that was it was, you know, it's one of those things. So back in those days to be written up in the post was a big deal, you know? So.

Conan Louis [00:43:59] So are there any other things that you would want to say about your football life at Georgetown that you haven't mentioned already?

James Chesley [00:44:07] Well, you know, I mean, I tell everyone, you know, a well-rounded student is a well-rounded student, and for me, football was that well-rounding. It's really why I think I did so well at Georgetown because I went out there every day in practice from four to 6:30 in the shower rush and get up to the mess hall, to the to the place to eat before it closed at 7:00 and then get to the library to study from seven to 12, you know, and that's what was a routine. And the friends I made with the football team were really good guys. There was a guy named Ralph Edwards. We called him Peanut cause, you know, Reggie, Alex Hampshire. But then there were a bunch of other guys who are my buddies still today: Bob Morris, Jimmy Kane, who were tri-captains with me. We were the football captains. Billy Sherry was my buddy, you know, forever on that Vince Bodansky who was a senior who took me under his wing when I came in as a freshman, which is a really nice guy. John Kuhns, who was just an amazing show you how you put it all on the field. I mean, just so many guys that I met that I knew that were friends, you know. Steve Odom, who was another defensive back on the other side of the corner? I was a corner store right now before another guy got hurt and I went back to strong safety. You know? Those things are what ground me to this day that, you know, the academics and so forth. But friendships last a lifetime, too. And you know, as things go on and people have health challenges, you can help when you help each other and you get to tell the stories get bigger every time you meet each year, the stories get bigger, better and show you the truth. Somewhere is in there. But yeah, football was was was a really important part for me for that because, you know, I know a lot of people look down athletes and so forth, but we really studied most of the GPAs of the guys on the football team were higher than most of the rest of the university. Taken as a whole because people really did work in the guys that played were really smart. And back then, we didn't have any women football players back then. So it was, you know, a rowdy bunch of guys. I didn't drink, but most of them did. And it was just a whole lot of fun to do and stuff. And you know, it would be a thing of, you know, ribbing each other, doing things and athletic prowess. And, you know, we were just very fortunate that group that came in 71. We all could have played somewhere else. So we came to Georgetown because of the athletic, I mean the academics, and we also could express our athletics on that. So football was a very integral part, and I still think no one says that. But I still think that's one of the things that when I applied to medical school, people looked and said, This is an oddity. He's got pretty good grades. He's got pretty good scores. Hmm. And he played football. Let's just see who he is. And I mean, I can remember coming in and, you know, being surrounded by them as they interrogate you for things and are quizzing you and so forth. And and one person actually said, So did you scramble your brain playing football? I said, Well, I'm answering your questions pretty well, so I think I'm scrambling you right now. And he they all got a kick at it because, you know, you come act and you don't have any sense to say, keep

your tongue in humbling. So it was it was a positive thing for me. It was a really positive thing. And just like, you know, when I talked to Lynn or I talked to Jackie, who I talked to Gail, you know, you know, we look back on things, you know, there's so many people in the class that. I grew with they were my good friends from that social side, that African-American bond that I needed, that was there, that really grounded and kept me there for Georgetown. Then I had that other side, I got my football side for those guys who really were were. Had my back. You know, we went to Boston to play one time and, you know, wasn't necessarily, the most culturally friendly place to play. And you know, I got off the bus, you know, and I don't fly well, you know, I threw up a little bit there laughing at the guys and we get out of there and go through the warm ups and scrimmage, you know, for that day before and pads. And the next day we come out there and I light them up. And it was just amazing, and I took out their half back on the first played a game and stretched him and intercepted hit. And my teammates had my back the entire time. And it was just one of those kind of things that. You know, regardless of what political swings may be, what your thoughts and all were, you a band of brothers out there together, you know, at that time, I don't know if we even had swings and all that, but you know, we were just trying to survive and we haven't eaten, you know? But it was a good time. So yeah, football was an integral part. It was a fun part. Nothing's going to take away from it. From my Georgetown experience. I mean, the friends I've met the Community Scholars program that summer, having friends going on thinking about the War concerts, the things that are important to me may not be as important as everyone else. It was, you know, getting a scholar athlete award, you know, doing the Cuhongoroton address. I mean, there's just so many things that Georgetown just gave me that I was fun, that I just embraced it. So, yeah, I have a lot of positive feelings. I know a lot of people don't. A lot of the things didn't. But for me, you know, yeah, there was. It wasn't all fun and games. It was some things where things weren't always like they were supposed to be. But you know, you, you know, hey, the glass was never half-empty was always half-full.

Conan Louis [00:49:09] So we talked about your experience through residency. Tell us about your career since then.

James Chesley [00:49:15] Yeah. Now, since then, I actually finished up at Hopkins. I did a GI fellowship there, so I went to gastroenterology and I do what I always wanted to do. I turned down all the appointments, the academic appointments for deciding to teach in and do this. I did my research and you know, did those kind of things are presented at the big meetings, but I decided to come back to my community where I grew up. So I practice where I was born and raised and take care of people and I do colonoscopies. And I've done now over 50,000 colonoscopies I've found. I don't know how many colon cancer taking out colon polyps, just lots and lots of things that that I've done, and it's been so rewarding. I've taken your family members, friends, I've had people who've come to me that I've been able to direct them and their their daughters and sons to get health care, deliver their kids and so forth that I've directed them to the OBGYN doctors. And so it's been a lot of fun. I've also been able to be on a lot of different boards and and promote, you know, health care for health disparities because I realized that was one of the things when I first came out, I was thinking, Wow, 70 percent of my practices is white. Where are all the African-Americans, you know, and people didn't do health care and get health care. So I gave out talks, churches and and gave things to different things of that nature, cause that's where the community was. And then I went to a lot of the city, sororities and fratss to their events and got to be known and, you know, let things be available to them. And I was very fortunate. I've been very, very fortunate in my life. I was able to give a lot of free care. So for people that didn't have interest in health care, we could still provide it. And so for the last 20 years, I've built an endoscopy center where we can actually do colonoscopies

on people and they don't have insurance, they don't have money. We, you know, we do, you know, we had someone last week who, you know, for whatever reason, didn't have health insurance, had never done a colonoscopy. We found a colon cancer, but able to get them into a program to be able to get them to get the services that they need so they can have their surgery, get the chemotherapy, the, you know, whatever it is that they're going to need, depending on going forward. So it's been a it's been a great ride for me, I mean Georgetown started the trek, you know, from there to Stanford to Hopkins, all it became because of Georgetown, you know? And I mean, Charlotte Hall obviously gave me that, that basically their foundation. But the thing I didn't tell you about was the thing that's probably the biggest foundation. They didn't have kindergarten when I started school, but grades one to seven was segregated from me, but that's where I actually got taught. That's where I got taught. It was teaching because we only had African-American teachers and they made sure we didn't have all the best books in the best new desk and so forth. But they taught us. And so I had a good, good, good foundation, and that's what made all the difference. So now I'm out here in the community right back right where I was and I go, still take my mother's is elderly, she's still she's still living and I go down there, you know, every day, every other day, and it's right by, I go by the school where I went as elementary, you know? So for me, it's a it's a it's a it's a it's just a great, great time. I've had a great ride, a great trip I got. I don't have regrets. You know, the things, the mistakes I've made and nothing's been perfect. And I mean, there's a bunch of stuff people say, oh yeah, but he did, but it's been it's been a good time. And like I say, the kin, the kinship, you know, I mean, I have two godsons. One of them is one of the guys at Georgetown, his wife, they both Georgetown graduates and they have a son and I'm their godfather. Then I have a guy from the military school where he and I were in school and I'm his godfather. And that means a lot. So those kind of things actually are still going on, and I'm just having a great time now and in the community and in almost 40 years of doing this, you know, it's it's been a great ride and loving it, loving every minute of it.

Conan Louis [00:52:51] Well, we're getting close to the end here. Just two more questions. What advice do you have for black students at Georgetown today?

James Chesley [00:53:00] Yeah, you know I. The advice I'm going to give is can probably be a little bit different than everyone else that they may hear in terms of the way in which I give it. I tell you going into Georgetown and look at things as it's going to be a positive experience. Anytime something bad happens, I look at it as a learning experience. Don't take anything personally there because every knucklehead that you're going to meet there are two people out there who are exact opposite who are going to have a positive thing for you. Don't let the economics and the finances get in your way because there is a way. I mean, it seems like it's almost impossible. And obviously, you know, it didn't cost a lot back there when I went to school comparatively. But compared to what moneys we had, it was a lot of money and I never knew how much, you know, but you found a way. Just persevere. Enjoy the university and what it has, meet as many people as you can enjoy the city. I didn't get to do that, but enjoy this. The city is a vibrant place, is a great place. It's got I mean, there's so many museums, so many things you can do for free that I didn't avail myself of because I was studying and maybe studying more than I needed to. Maybe I could have studied a little bit less and done a little bit more. But those are the things I would tell the students there enjoy. The university has so much to offer and embrace it, you know? Look at your other students for a lot of guidance, because that's that's what this is going to be, which you're going to have for a lifetime. You're going to make lasting relationships that will last you a lifetime. Some of them may be marital, but most of them will be just deep friends that you will have and you always rely on and care about. I mean, like, you know, I think so much of you, when I do stuff, well if Conan asks me to do it,

yeah, I'm doing it. You know, it's why. Because you know, people, you know, you say, Man, I can remember Conan was the Black Student Alliance President, the stuff he says, what he stood for, integrity. And you find out about people when you. This is the time you found out about people. You know, this is this is the time I tell students when I come back and talk to to the football team, you know, usually once every three or four years or however they do it and mentor and so forth. Enjoy the university. Suck in everything it can give you and offer you. I mean, nothing is is is not worth doing. I mean, people say why you joined Alpha Sigma Nu National Jesuit Honor Society? Why? Because they invited me, yes, I'm going to do it. You know, there are just so many things you can avail yourself of. So that's what I would recommend. Enjoy the university. Embrace it. And you can still maintain your cultural identity.

Conan Louis [00:55:34] Yeah. So you're also, by the way, currently serving on the university's Board of Regents. Correct? Correct. Got. How's that?

James Chesley [00:55:44] That's been a blast. I didn't know anything about that either. You know, I got I got my name, got put in back by one of our our people who just now Black Alumni Summit. And when she put forth my name at it, Regents, OK, you know, I've been doing stuff in on it, on the unofficial ways with the university. So this was something official. But if you get invited to any of these things, do them because what thy, it does is let you know what the university's actually doing? It makes you feel even better about the university, about all the things that's happening. You find out about the things that the University's doing behind the scenes. I mean, most of us know that the president DeGioia is just a really, really great person. I mean, he, you know that you couldn't have a better person for us as African-Americans, but for the student body in whole, but for Georgetown University and its global appearance to people, I mean, he has such a positive influence on everything. Now, of course we know he's now with the NCAA and he's in charge of that and so forth. But I'm talking about on the academic level the way in which he does things, the way he comports himself. But you find these things out with the Regents, you find out what Georgetown is doing the forefront it's on. Naturally, when COVID came, I was very big into that and promoting that and a big promoter of, you know, Hey, what do you do wear your mask, PPE, taking it for serious, it's not a fake. It's not a hoax. Get your vaccine, all this sort of thing. But I found out Georgetown was doing some of those things, too. I found out about, Oh, there's some opportunities that are out here that people can have for doing things such as. Look at what to do if the new law that they built downtown. Look at what they're doing with the new health disparities, things that's being done. That's coming up the people don't know about. There's so much you can find out about with being on the regents. It's not only you giving, but you learning and being able to spread the word, which is what I've been doing with other people as I get a chance to let them know. So yeah, I mean, the Board of Regents, this is being on the Regents has been very positive for me because it was stuff I didn't know and maybe a lot of people say, Oh yeah, I knew they did that. Oh, yeah, I knew they did. But there's so much more. You don't know that I'm not seeing here that you can find out about when you go to the meetings, when you attend and you've got so many subcommittees and you can do what you want, you can do as much or as little as you want. There's no requirement or you got to do this. You have it, no, it's not like that. It's about a learning and education, and it's fun.

Conan Louis [00:58:03] Last question. What does it mean to you to be a black man at Georgetown, not just as an undergraduate, but as a part of this community?

James Chesley [00:58:19] Yeah, I probably should say it gives me pride. I didn't know I was among such an elite group as it is that I am among because I see people like you. I

see people like Don Horton. I see things that people have done. I mean, I look at all the people that have come before me. You know, and I'm saying it's not that many, but they are fanta ... they were sharp. But then I look at all the young people coming behind. When I talk to the young, the young people now when they come. Wow. We have a vibrant, strong, intelligent, strong community. We just have to maintain and continue doing. I feel so proud to be an alumnus of Georgetown. I mean, it is I mean, it is with extreme pride. I mean to to say, Wow, wait a minute, you're black. You came from Georgetown. You sure, what year? What? I mean, to me, to be a member of the Georgetown academic community is just superb. And to do it as an African-American, knowing how few of us and still how few of us that there are. It's just it's just a wonderful thing. So I I beam with pride. I mean, people say, Oh yeah, you went to Hopkins, you went to Stanford. Yeah, I love those places. Don't get me wrong, I love Stanford, but Georgetown is my heart. I mean, it's it's my undergrad that that wow, the stuff we do. And, you know, people say we didn't mention the basketball team, you know, I mean, it's all good, but it's it's it's the community. It's the people I met there; it's the people I've known, the integrity they have, the things they do. Yeah, we get a lot of people there. You know, we had this person, that person, they're higher-ups. But there's so many people that I've met that are just good, wonderful people doing good for the world that that, yeah, we make an impact. We're important; we are Georgetown. We Are Georgetown.

Conan Louis [01:00:05] Dr. James Chesley College Class of '75, thank you so much for spending some time with us today. Hoya Saxa!,

James Chesley [01:00:13] Hoya Saxa! Thanks for having me. Thank you.