Kristine Andrews [00:00:00] Okay. Today's date is Tuesday, April 23rd, 2024. My name is Kristine Andrews, and I'm interviewing Tycely Williams as part of the We Are Georgetown: Celebrating our Black History oral history project, sponsored by the Black Alumni Council. Thank you so much for joining me.

Tycely Williams [00:00:25] You too, Kristine, for having me. I'm super excited to dive into a conversation today.

Kristine Andrews [00:00:32] Perfect. So let's start off by just getting to learn a little bit about you. So if you would reiterate your name, your Georgetown class, and your undergraduate college, please.

Tycely Williams [00:00:45] Absolutely. So my name is Tycely Williams. I graduated from Georgetown's McDonough School of Business in 2014. My undergraduate degree is in communications and marketing from Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Kristine Andrews [00:01:08] Perfect. And where are you originally from?

Tycely Williams [00:01:10] I am originally from the great state of Alabama, the Deep South, Birmingham to be exact, and found my way to Washington, D.C., primarily because of my interest in the not-for-profit sector. And as we know here in the nation's capital, it is also home to many of the world's most meaningful charitable organizations. And so it was the social impact space that led me to D.C. and those Jesuit values that led me to Georgetown.

Kristine Andrews [00:01:52] And I was just going to ask you, how did you even learn about Georgetown as an option, and why did you select Georgetown of all your choices? Why Georgetown?

Tycely Williams [00:02:01] So it's interesting. Growing up, my father, who played college basketball at a Historically Black College and University always had a very positive perspective as it pertained to Georgetown largely because of athletics, basketball, one of America's greatest coaches. And I really, as a young person, grew up hearing about Georgetown and its athletic elements of excellence. And it probably wasn't until about middle school because, believe it or not, I went to school when there wasn't an internet. And so the way you got to learn about places and spaces that were not in close proximity, either something showed up in your mailbox or you would overhear adults having conversations, recounting experiences. And I remember listening to some of the high school students thinking about where they wanted to go to school, and then people kept talking about Georgetown and how prestigious it was, and it really sparked my interest. I didn't have a reference point. I knew that it had an exceptional reputation, but it really wasn't until high school, I began learning more about all of the excellent elements of Georgetown.

Kristine Andrews [00:03:42] Okay, so you found your way to Georgetown based on reputation, word of mouth. What was your major? What did you study at Georgetown and what school were you in while you were there?
Absolutely. So I was a part of the executive education. And what’s really great about coming back to school after you’ve spent some time in the workforce is that you have a reference point for all of the amazing theories and all that you’re learning. And so I was interested in the business school, and there were several programs being offered at McDonough that really, really interested me. But the program that I was most drawn to was an executive master’s in leadership, and they were several reasons why I was drawn to that particular concentration and form of study, but it was primarily because it focused on interpersonal elements of connecting and influencing people. There was a concentration on negotiation, conflict resolution, and that nicely paralleled to what I studied in my undergraduate degree. And so I believe that it is so important to master the way in which we communicate and connect with other living and breathing human beings. And leadership is something that I always been fascinated by. I, like many people, aspire to be respected and reputable leader. And as the oldest of four children, I got it early dose of leadership. And so I said, gee, I’m interested in learning a little bit more about what the social science says about the best way to lead. And Georgetown was an excellent choice and decision because of the Jesuit values that I referenced earlier. I grew up in the Deep South, and even though I am a practicing Christian, I do have an element of inclusiveness attached to how I practice my faith. But it’s really wonderful, visiting Georgetown. So before I made the commitment to start the program, back in the day, there was an option for prospective students to come to the Hilltop to sit in on classes and to give thought to whether or not you could see yourself making the 14-month commitment. And I remember walking into the classroom, and it was the first time in my life I was actually in an education setting and there was a cross literally above the door, the entrance. And I was really comforted by that because it wasn't the type of environment where people wear, where they were wearing their faith or their Christianity in ways that it was a hindrance, but it was just this really genuine positioning of the values that aligned with my interpretation of what it means to be a decent human being. And so I was really excited about the opportunity to have my mind and my skills and my tools sharpened under that type of mantra.

Wonderful. You've already kind of shared some of them, the moments that visit to campus that really stood out for you. I'm wondering when you were a student. Tell me about a memorable class that you took and what made that. And it can be a professor that you remember. It doesn't have to be a class.

Yeah. So there were so many magical moments at Georgetown. I'll say for me, probably the most prominent in my memory is the presence of the dean of the business school. And I remember as a younger scholar reading a little bit about Dean Thomas and some of his research, which really centered around how African-American and Black executives found themselves performing in corporate board seats. And it was just such interesting research. And I remember before coming to Georgetown, I think Dean Thomas was teaching at Harvard, and I was just really fascinated by the fact that he was introducing this notion of identity. And now, many years removed from that, it seems like it's such a sensible thing to do. But there was a time when you would pick up scholarly research or you would open a magazine, and there wasn't specificity about the lived experiences of Black people, and it was often Black people would have certain conversations and our places of worship and communities, and they were not necessarily the same types of conversations that were unfolding in white, dominant spaces where we found ourselves. And so I remember early on just really being drawn to the research of David Thomas and wanting to learn more about what he learned as a result of observing high performing Black leaders, literally at some of the highest levels within corporate America. And what, Kristine, was really interesting about the
research and what is always stayed with me was basically, got to try to distill this in ways where it isn't so wonky and it is more easy to digest. But basically there's this notion of, you know, extroverted and introverted thinking, right. And so extroverted thinking means ask me a question and I just begin speaking. I start talking when I form one sentence, and then the second sentence is formed, and then eventually by the fifth or sixth sentence, I've landed to the place where I've found my way to the answer. And you've patiently engaged as the listener, and you're nodding your head and you're saying yes, Tycely, Okay, yes, I see that. The introspective way of approaching a conversation is to reflect on your question and to respond when I have formed a concise answer to your question. And what happens then is you're like, wow, that was genius. Every time we call on Tycely, she has something very smart to say. And so what I learned from that is when you are engaging and conversing with others, it's so important to not only be an active listener, but to really step into the exchange and to practice thinking in your mind before you speak with your lips. And that has been something that has served me well. It's been something that I practice over the course of my career, and I can say that it has helped others to perceive me as probably being smarter and more wise than I actually am. But the mere tactic of slowing down, of processing through my thoughts and then communicating when I have a fully formed thought has certainly been something that I credit to Georgetown and to Dean Thomas.

Kristine Andrews [00:12:15] I love that story. Thank you. And it clearly stood out for you. You graduated in class of 2014, you said, right?

Tycely Williams [00:12:22] That's right.

Kristine Andrews [00:12:23] So here we are ten years later and that is a nugget that stuck with you. I so appreciate that because it's clearly applicable in your world and in your work right now. I love it.

Tycely Williams [00:12:35] That's right.

Kristine Andrews [00:12:36] Okay. So executive education program, were there opportunities or did you engage in activities, clubs, campus organizations, or is that something that in that program really wasn't part of campus life for you?

Tycely Williams [00:12:53] You know, I will say that campus life for us consisted of a lot of studying. So our program essentially was every other weekend we rolled onto campus, had to be in our seats by 8 a.m., and we had a full day on Friday, and then we would have a half day on Saturday. And there was a lot of intensity tied and connected to that commitment. And it was a small cohort. There were less than 40 of us, and many of my classmates actually flew in to Washington, DC for this exceptional opportunity because it made me feel a little bad about complaining that I had to, like, drive over, you know, a bridge to get to Georgetown. But I will say, what was really unique and really special about the opportunity is that all of our classmates were supportive sources of encouragement, and we had a very special bond and affinity with the eight African-American women in my class. We studied together. We supported each other through the ups and downs of life. And as you can imagine, being somewhat removed from your 20s and being in your early to mid 30s, you were really faced with real life situations and circumstances. And I look back on those moments and it is yet another, teachable moment. It is important to have sources of support, and it's important to have sources of support who look like you and sources of support who can fully appreciate even what you're unable to communicate about what you're experiencing. And that is what is really special and spectacular about
the band of sisters, who I connected with and forged and formed relationships with in 2013. So I will say a lot of my activities, they were organic activities. But, you know, we would find our way to campus bookstore, lots of retail therapy. We would find our way to green spaces. And we spent a lot of time studying outdoors and outside. We would also find ourselves kind of parachuting beyond the structured program into our homes. And it was just a very safe and supportive environment. And so we would find our ways to basketball games and oftentimes walk out to catch, you know, practices that were on the field. But the energy was always electrifying. And that's the great thing about the placement of the business school is that you have the opportunity to kind of look out and see and sense a lot of what's going on on campus, and on the Hilltop.

**Kristine Andrews [00:16:35]** You just keep answering my next question before I ask my next question. So you're on top of it. I think that describing your kind of band of sisters as you described speaks a lot to kind of the not only memories you have associated with the place, but also you started to describe just the culture of Georgetown,

**Tycely Williams [00:16:57]** Yes. Yes.

**Kristine Andrews [00:16:58]** when you attended it. Is there anything you'd want to say more about what generally the culture of Georgetown?

**Tycely Williams [00:17:04]** Absolutely. You know, it's interesting. I remember being introduced to the words Hoya Saxa, and I did not study Greek in school. And I remember thinking to myself, you know, what is it? What does it mean? And I remember someone, and this is a professor who had taught for many, many decades, and he would often say, it means what you feel. And I thought that is a non-academic answer from an academician but what does it mean? And I remember Dr. Lamar saying after you're done with your commitment, I'd like for you to describe to me what it means. And it's so interesting when you give people permission to step into these, these closely held mantras, norms, principles. And you say to people, you have the ability to shape, classify, define as you see it. It is really wonderful because I think I would speak to the cure, exceptionalist of Hoya Saxa, in the same way that my colleagues will, and I think a lot of it is tied to our ethics and our values. I have never been in a place, and our current Dean Almeida would often say, you know, here at Georgetown we are called to be the best in the world and the best for the world. And there's something about this shared understanding of goodness. There's something about, regardless of your race, ethnicity, your religion, where you find yourself hailing from regardless of the corner of the globe from which you come. There's this shared understanding of what it means to be a person of integrity, what it means to be someone who is called not only to serve, but someone who is called to serve and solve problems for the greater good. And that to me is what the business school gifts and grants. So whether you find yourself in the not-for-profit sector, like me, in the social impact space, or whether you find yourself in a for-profit venture, it is all about having the tools to solve problems. And it is also what Hoya Saxa is it about the way in which we solve the problems. We solve problems in ways that are inclusive, participatory in ways that invites other people to the table and is really, really intentional about not excluding people. And so I will just say, you know, Georgetown has been for me, all that I thought it would and could and should be. And it is also nice to see that Georgetown continues to uphold ethics, values and standards, across all of the schools and colleges.
Kristine Andrews [00:21:01] Thank you for that response. I'm curious about the timing of when you were at school. So 2014, where there are events in the wider world that you or your fellow students are particularly concerned about but impacted by and how so?

Tycely Williams [00:21:21] Yeah, so 2013 was a very interesting year for a variety of reasons. I will say, for many of us, this was the first time we had been introduced to formal instruction that introduced the notion of race. And for us, race was being centered because our capstone project was taking place in South Africa and some of us were going to do projects in Joburg. Some of us were going to Cape Town and in preparation for our capstone projects, we were introduced to cultural competencies. And what was really interesting about that moment in time is that the wider world, and certainly here in the States, there was not this pronounced emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion. There was also not a lot of acknowledgment that slavery happened here in the States. And what was really interesting, through the pathway of learning, of helping to prepare us to relate and ultimately consult with individuals in South Africa, we were introduced to their history and their heritage, and it was really fascinating how things began to like parallel here in the States. The difference is in South Africa, they reached places of reconciliation as a result of actions that were taken that it seemed we never reached in the States. And so around that time, Nelson Mandela had passed. And it was such an interesting time to look back on his indelible, exceptional contribution to mankind and to really reflect on what needed to be done here in the States to adequately introduce a notion of restoration like was it reparations? And I remember very, very smart, exceptionally bright students who really had to like, call the question like, well, what are reparations? Like how does that work? What could that mean? And at this time, there weren't any university sanctioned projects that looked into or explored how Georgetown benefited from slaves. And, there weren't any attempts around the country or within the states to reflect on how do we center DEI. You know, these were just foreign concepts. But it is interesting that while the Black students had their own opinions and perspectives around the path forward, all of our peers interpreted history the same way we did. All of our peers had the same emphatic insistence that you couldn't pretend your way out of slavery, that it was a truth. It was something that need to be acknowledged. It was something that we needed to teach. And it wasn't Black history, it was American history. And that was a really defining moment for me, because growing up in the Deep South and being in educational environments where either knowingly or unknowingly, those who held the power, the teachers, the instructors, they often shaped your understanding through their understanding. And they didn't even have the awareness or insight to acknowledge the deficiency. They didn't invite students in to say, I'm not able to speak on this because I have not had to go to a water fountain that was any different than the water fountain I've always gone to, or I haven't been denied access. So maybe I want to create space for those who may have experienced this, to speak on what the intended and unintended consequences are. It was so refreshing at Georgetown, and especially as a part of the executive education, to be in a structured environment where our professors truly taught us how to think independently. They weren't teaching us how to mirror their thinking. They were introducing adaptive strategies that allowed us to form our own independent thoughts and allowed us to learn from one another. And they were more so facilitating classes versus it being this one way I'm going to stand and lecture. There's a command and control, and you're going to absorb the information and just reflect back what I introduced to you. And it was really wonderful being in a space where you're thinking was shaped and sharpened and fertilized by one individual who was willing to share their power.

Kristine Andrews [00:27:49] Absolutely! Thank you. So now this question, it's totally okay if you do not have an answer.
Okay.

Were there any particularly noteworthy figures on campus that stood out and that could be other university staff, it could be cafeteria worker, it could be the GPD, the Georgetown University police, officers. Was there any particularly noteworthy figures on campus for you?

So many noteworthy figures, you know, I will once again reference the presence of, you know, Dean David Thomas. I mean, he was exceptional knowing that I was attending a business school and that there was an African American man who had accomplished as much as he had accomplished and, was as respected and revered as he was on campus. So he was a larger than life figure, most definitely. I would also say, because we did a lot of good eating, as we say in the Deep South, eating high on the hog, rollin' on over to having our, our bellies full. I will say that there were countless people who not only greeted and hosted, but who really took the time while serving, Mr. Eric in particular to say, how is school going? How are classes? What are you learning? How are you feeling? I'm proud of you. You're almost there. You've got three months behind you. You're gonna make it. And it was just such a comfort. A - seeing someone who was not necessarily in a designated position of power. This was not the person standing up in front of the class. This was not the person creating the assignments, but yet this person was equally, if not more excited to see the varying hues in the class, to acknowledge that there were brilliant and bright Black students putting their best foot forward and pushing and pressing hopefully to what would one day be a celebration and graduation and, and those sentiments and those types of expressions really carried me not only from week to week, but month to month, and even when I go back to visit, I am always intentional about looking for the people who were the unsung heroes, the people who you won't see in the magazine, and the people who you won't see referenced time on a building, but the people who have made countless contributions to our health and our well-being, and who have not only, you know, fed our tummies, but have literally, fed our souls. And so I definitely just want to give a shout out to all of the hostesses and waitstaff and Mr. Eric in the cafeteria and the faculty lounge for just always did an exceptional job taking care of us. And then just say, I think when you are on the campus of Georgetown, it is so hard to kind of subtract out from the legacy of Healy Hall of Patrick Healy. And I think that the legacy of Patrick Healy is one that often inspires me whenever I think of Georgetown. And I remember sitting in class hearing about an annual dinner that takes place that honors who, I'm pretty sure, and I might have to fact check myself on this, Kristen, is the first person of color to lead a predominantly white university. And I just remember, like the pride that I had learning that I was at an institution that had the foresight to see someone's competency and their capabilities. And it was not a hinderance the color of their skin that they were given space and opportunity to lead. And so Patrick Healy is certainly a legacy that resonated with me on campus and I'm sure continues to resonate with our students.

Sure. Absolutely. All right. We're going to transition to our last segment and just talk a little bit about the lasting impact of Georgetown. So tell me what you have done since leaving Georgetown.

Since leaving, you know, it's interesting. I will say, you know, my first pivot away from Georgetown formerly really became during Tropaia and during our graduation weekend, and I was selected by my peers to give remarks on behalf of our class. And that was probably not only a moment of pride, but a moment that really helped
me to better see my own promise and potential in ways that were validated by my peers. And so I told you, I stepped into this study of leadership really for a selfish reason. I wanted to be a better leader. I want it to be respected. I want it to be someone that my peers would consider trustworthy. And I really wanted to take what I think were some good inherent tendencies to really take those to the next level. And so as I stepped away from Georgetown in the summer of 2014, I was really reminded of how close Georgetown is within the District of Columbia in Washington, D.C.. And so I think the first thing that you do when you're accepted is that you get swagged up and you can see today it's like all about the Hoya Saxa, and I'm always so proud to rock my Georgetown gear. And it's not only because of completion, I mean I'm glad that I completed the program, but I am so proud of our principles and values, and I'm so proud of the way in which we show up in the world. And I am proud that we're not only the best in the world, that we continue to be the best for the world. So I will say upon leaving, I continue to be involved, and I hope that all who have the opportunity to be a part of the Georgetown University family will also find a way to give back. It's a wonderful way to move forward and to give back, and it's a privilege. And so I volunteered. I typically go back with the business school to judge our competitions, their various competitions that students have with our executive MBA program. And I typically go back to see what some of the world's most brilliant brains are serving up. And it's great to kind of listen and learn. I also volunteer with an advisory circle. CIRCLE is the actual name of the acronym, and it is basically an advisory council of C-suite executives that provide guidance, insights in building the executive programs. And it is through giving back in that formal way that I was invited to sit down and have the conversation with you today. So Gary Gadson, who actually leads CIRCLE, was kind enough to say to Mike Ford, that is someone you should give consideration to and invite to be a part of the project. And so there within is another example that when you give, there's often something to receive in return.

Kristine Andrews [00:37:35] Yes. Agreed. But I want to also hear as you reflect back how you would describe the impact of Georgetown's education on you, personally and professionally?

Tycely Williams [00:37:48] Wow. So, Kristine, that's a really, really meaningful question. It has been profound for me. It is not only helped me to learn and grow in my day-to-day execution as a leader, but it has also helped me to increase my confidence. It is helped me to better understand not only what I've learned, but it continues to challenge me to become my aspirational self. And I'll say the one additional legacy with Georgetown is there's this notion of lifelong learning that permeates in the business school, and certainly amongst those of us who went back to school to pursue an executive education. But in this whole notion of lifelong learning, Georgetown has reminded me that I still need to be open to learning from younger generations. I need to be open to learning from people outside of the States. I need to be open to learning from different industries. You know, the experiences that I had in Georgetown, which were deeply centered in rooted in what I call the diversification factor. You know, diversity abound in so many ways with great intentionality. And I am just reminded, as I push forward to the future, that I need to rely on those lessons I learned in my past, all from Georgetown. And so while the credentials are helpful on a resumé, I'm sure they are useful on LinkedIn and any other avenue by which you are promoting your competency and your abilities. And again, I am grateful for all of the educational attainment I gifted and granted from Georgetown, but I am most grateful for the way in which it also helped to sharpen my intellectual, IQ. So I just think, you know, it's just it's so important to think about emotional intelligence. And when I think of Georgetown, it is not only the intellectual intelligence, but it's also the emotional intelligence that's wrapped around and integrated in all that we do.
All right. So if you were giving advice to other Black students at Georgetown, what words of wisdom, what would your advice be to other students of the Black students at Georgetown?

My advice is to see your Blackness as a blessing. To use our collective strength, which has been a part of our heritage for many, many centuries. Reflect on triumphs of our people. Find courage and inspiration in our abilities to do a lot with a little. So when you’re faced with what seems like an impossible task, think about how much more is in reach for you. And really challenge yourself to take advantage of the opportunity not only that you’ve been gifted and granted, but the opportunity that so many have sacrificed for us to have. I hope that you will also, along the way, as Nelson Mandela would remind us, that you learn the importance of leading from the front, side and behind. And as you seek to lead yourself first, think about those faithful followers who actually enable you to be a leader. Because without faithful followers, you’re single and solo, journeying through life. And so when you find yourself in positions where you’re leading, be comfortable enough leading from the front with confidence, with courage, with conviction. Be wise enough to lead side by side. Sometimes realizing that the strength that you have is actually a strength and a source of encouragement that someone needs to experience with your presence being shoulder to shoulder, journeying beside them. And then also tap into even more introspective thinking to realize that some of the best positions for a leader to be in is in a place of celebration, where you are looking ahead and there are people who are first and forward, and you are actually pushing from the rear with encouragement, with excitement, with enthusiasm. And that's how I envision myself at this moment in this interview. You know, I stepped into Georgetown in 2013, stepped out in 2014, in it's 2024 and there's an entire decade of talent rightfully positioned ahead of me. And it is my hope that other generations will do what we've seen our ancestors do, and that is to make room and to make way. And in doing so, to show up in support of one another.

Wow, Kristine, what does it mean for me to be Black?

At Georgetown.

It means that you were chosen, you were called, you were convincing, you should be comfortable. There were times at Georgetown and not very many, there were times at Georgetown where it seemed as if the perspective of the underrepresented possibly lied outside of Black people. That when professor wanted to hear varying opinion or perspective that maybe an individual was called on who did not share our heritage. But what I experienced more so than those single isolated moments is that more often than not, there was a culture of acceptance. There was a culture that acknowledged the unique contributions of Black students, and there was a culture tied and connected to Black administrators, Black professors, Black thought leaders who were very emphatic and insistent that the Black experience at Georgetown would be acknowledged. It would be affirmed, and if only appreciated by us, that we would ensure that there was a rightful element of appreciation attached to our experiences of being Black at Georgetown.
Kristine Andrews [00:47:10] Wonderful. It's been such a pleasure getting to know you with these questions and hear your story. So on behalf of this project, oral history, I just want to thank you for your time.