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2022 Black History Month Panel Discussion

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2022 Black History Month Panel Discussion

February 16, 2022

Location: Notre Dame Law School, Eck Hall of Law, University of Notre Dame

Moderator: - Max Gaston '13 J.D., Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Notre Dame Law School

Panelists: - G. Marcus Cole, Joseph A. Matson Dean & Professor of Law at Notre Dame Law School; Alvin McKenna '66 J.D., Counsel to the Firm at Porter Wright in Columbus, Ohio; Judge Ann Clair Williams '75 J.D., Of Counsel at Jones Day in Chicago, Retired Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit; and Paris Mayfield '21 J.D., Associate at Duane Morris LLP in Chicago

On February 16, 2022, a panel of Notre Dame Lawyers discussed the sources of their inspiration, overcoming challenges, advice for law students and young attorneys, and what it means to be a "different kind of lawyer."

English (auto-generated)

0:12

thank you so much for being here with us for black history month uh this is gonna be a panel with a

0:17

really uh wonderful group so hopefully we'll have a really interesting conversation we only have about an hour

0:24

so i'm gonna go ahead and introduce our different analysts and we'll dive right in um after we get through as many of

0:30

the questions that we've had as a submit from students uh well if there's time left have a live

0:36

q a so uh definitely if you hear something that raises your question hold on to it and you might be able to get to

0:42

it towards the end um but thank you again so much to every one of our

0:48

panelists who is here now i'm gonna go ahead and get started with our panelists on zoom um and i'll start with alvin

0:55

mckenna so mr mckenna is a graduate of the narrative law school class of 66 he

1:01

is a former senior staff member on the notre dame law review and the law school's first african-american graduate

1:07

uh his practice as a litigator has led him to be widely recognized as one of the best lawyers in ohio and often

1:14

regularly selected for inclusion and the best lawyers in america his practices included labor and

1:20

employment matters federal state government regulation constitutional issues and his

representation in those

1:25

cases has led to several precedent-setting decisions in various parts of the country

1:31

uh currently mr mckenna serves as counsel to the firm's quarter right in columbus ohio and

serves by appointment

1:37

from the president of notre dame as a member of the law school's advisory council welcome mr

mckenna

1:44

thank you judge anneclair williams who is also here over zoom is a graduate of the law

1:50

school class of 75 in 1985 president ronald reagan nominated her to the u.s

1:56

district court for the northern district of illinois making her the first woman of color to serve on

a district court in

2:03

the three-state 7th circuit 14 years later in 1999 president bill clinton's nomination made

2:10

her the first judge of color to sit on the u.s court of appeals for the seventh circuit and the third black woman to

2:18

serve on any federal circuit court currently judge williams serves as of council at jones day in

chicago where

2:24

she heads the law firm's efforts in advancing the rule of law in chicago she's partnered with

federal government

2:30

and ngos to lead training programs across africa and indonesia and judge williams has also

taught at the

2:37

international criminal tribunals for rwanda and former yugoslavia welcome judge williams

2:42

good morning thank you good afternoon sorry

2:48

it's still morning in chicago oh yeah there you go

2:53

uh it is true moving on to paris williams uh paris williams is also in uh city part of mayfield uh who's also in

3:00

chicago uh paris as many of you know graduated from the law school last year in 2021 where she was executive editor

3:06

of the notre dame journal on emerging technologies she's currently practicing as a litigation associate with dwayne

3:12

morris in chicago and is someone i'm sure many of you remember from her time here because many of you were here when

3:18

she was here finally a man who needs no introduction

3:24

uh dean g marcus cole is not only the first black dean of the law school he's also

3:29

the first black dean of any school at the university of notre dame his time at the law school so far has

3:35

already led to significant initiatives that have supported a safer and a more inclusive environment for our students

3:41

of color and has helped to unite the law school and the mission of the of the catholic church um one of those

3:47

initiatives being the creation of the law school's office of diversity equity and inclusion uh which i'm particularly

3:54

grateful for because it's the office that i manage uh welcome paris and jim cole thank you

4:00

for being here okay so we have a number of questions that were submitted by the black boston

4:06

association members and i want to get started with you mr mckenna on this first question which is

4:12

what was your experience like at notre dame and how did that experience prepare you for what would be the practice of

4:20

law and were there any notable challenges to your time that you encountered while you were in law school

4:27

well uh experience was scary

4:34

as i think you can see from the zoom i i got there

4:41

having written an essay to dino mirror

4:48

when i decided i was going to challenge the world i guess on racial issues

4:55

i went i went to college at age 16

5:01

to be a chemist and after a year of sitting in a lab by

5:06

myself i decided this isn't for me so i decided to get into

5:13

political science which was a new major at canisius college in buffalo

5:20

then as i got near graduation i realized nobody was hiring political scientists

5:26

so i had to find something else to do and uh i guess i decided with a bunch of my

5:33

fellow classmates to go take the lsat um did respectable in that and uh

5:41

ended up at the notre dame law school i i i think i've heard a story before i

5:49

was not good enough to get into the undergraduate school with the uh scholarship so i

5:56

ended up at canisius and uh where i had a full scholarship covering everything

6:02

which was the only way i would go to college um

6:07

and uh a lot of things were new to me i i come

6:14

from the inner city of new orleans where one of your questions i saw was

6:21

who inspired you to become a lawyer there really weren't many black lawyers

6:26

in new orleans there were three that i recalled one was ap turo who was the father

6:35

of a young lady i went to seven years of elementary school with

6:42

what i knew about him was he was going around the state in the country with

6:47

people like thurgood marshall challenging various

6:53

discriminatory activities

6:58

the other was the son of my godfather who

7:04

couldn't practice law so he was selling insurance and the other one was a fellow named

7:09

israel augustine who if you got to meet him you probably were in trouble

7:14

because he did a lot of criminal work um so there really wasn't anyone that

7:22

inspired me to become a lawyer i just became a lawyer

7:28

and um i found as i got to notre dame i had a lot of classmates who had

7:36

fathers who were lawyers relatives who were lawyers i had none of that

7:43

my parents uh neither one of them finished elementary school

7:49

but they were big on getting an education my older brother disappointed him

7:54

because all he wanted to do was join the marines and drag my father down to the

8:01

um recruiting station on his 17th birthday to join the marine so

8:06

i was it and but i was pushed along to to pursue

8:12

academics i was not a jock and certainly not a musician

8:19

so that's how i ended up there and the experience that the people were were

8:25

great both the professors and my classmates uh

8:30

so it it was a you know an experience or a true learning experience not only learning about the law

8:38

but learning a lot about life and what goes on in the world

8:45

hopefully that covers it judge williams i would love to hear your

8:50

answers to that question as well and mr mckenna raises an interesting uh idea of not just being a student of color but

8:56

also being a first generation student and i'm sure you both know we have a first generation student group here now but uh would be very interested to know

9:03

what your experience was like while you were at the law school and if there were any uh barriers that you encountered

9:11

you're muted i believe you're on mute

9:17

for me similar experience but at least you knew some lawyers i never knew a lawyer i grew up in detroit

9:24

michigan and um both of my parents were victims of discrimination they both worked their

9:33

way through college received college degrees at historically black colleges

9:38

my mother uh tried to get a job as a teacher but blacks weren't being hired in the in the school system the detroit

9:44

public school system so she worked at a home for delinquent kids for 12 years and then she was a substitute teacher

9:51

for five years 17 years later she got a contract my father had a degree in psychology and

9:57

political science he came to detroit and like many black men

10:03

he he he couldn't find him well educated he couldn't find a job he tried to sell insurance he didn't sell

10:09

one insurance policy he was not a good salesman so he ended up driving a bus with a lot

10:15

of black men who had been trained as accountants and lawyers and in other fields

10:22

so after um 20 years he decided to apply for a supervisory position

10:28

he was interviewed for the position the white guy who interviewed him told him he wasn't competent to be a

10:34

supervisor even though my father had been a staff sergeant in the army and run a division of course under a

10:42

white captain and he got mad and he decided to go back to school to get another degree

10:49

and i was getting my degree in elementary education and as fate would have it

10:55

daddy ended up coming back to wayne where i was working my way through school and we

11:00

were in classes together and it was in a speech class daddy wasn't in that

11:07

class but i was asked to discuss who i admired the most in my life

11:13

and that was when it hit me bus driver college degree college degree bus driver

11:19

so i came home and i asked daddy how could he stand it he had been driving a degree driving a bus with a degree

11:26

and he said well no one could take his education away from him he wanted to and being a bus driver was

11:33

good honest decent work and he did it because he wanted to support me and my sisters and my mother

11:40

he did what he had to do but he had that dream of us going further

11:46

and so my father has been my inspiration but in terms of growing up perry mason

11:52

was who i do because perry mason won every case and what i loved about perry

11:57

mason was he'd be cross-examining somebody on the stand and they would confess or better yet he would turn to

12:03

the audience start crossing somebody in the gallery and they would confess and so i knew

12:09

about perry mason but i was not planning to go to law school until a friend of mine i was getting my master's from

12:15

university of michigan guidance and counseling said that he was thinking of going to

12:21

law school we were kind of competitive i said well so am i so

12:26

i didn't know we needed a test i didn't need a test to get my masters at michigan because i was working full time as a

12:32

teacher there was no admission exam i took the test late no prep whatsoever

12:38

thank you god i did well but of course i took it late in february yale harvard

12:44

notre dame michigan wayne state no but see us next year but willie

12:49

lipscomb another prominent graduate of notre dame was on campus

12:55

in a summer program granville cleveland was the only african-american associated with the law school he was assistant law

13:02

librarian he was on the admissions committee granville told willie someone canceled in the class

13:08

and he recommended willie recommended me so i to this day have my acceptance and

13:15

rejection letter from notre dame and that's how i started of course i had thurgood marshall

13:21

and his team in the back of my mind i had read about them in jet but they weren't real to me

13:28

and it wasn't until i got all those rejections i started thinking well teachers teach and lawyers teach lawyers

13:35

teach their clients opposing counsel judges teachers council and lawyers counsel

13:40

teachers have to persuade and present material and so i said well maybe i could do this so i rolled into campus

13:47

one day before class started called willie was so excited in my dorm willie

13:52

said and i quote and claire have you done the reading and i said willie what are you talking

13:58

about he said we have two classes together and you have reading i got my little

14:03

volkswagen it was before gps and navigation made my way to willy's willy

14:09

had to literally explain to me how a defendant could be an appellee he had to

14:15

explain all the terms to me i'm writing in the margins because i don't know anything

14:20

that's how i started so i say to all of you today look at where i ended up

14:27

look at what the blessings are that you have you have people that you can look up to that can mentor you that are

14:32

examples for you and you can go way beyond anything i did that's how i started notre dame so it was a rough

14:39

start for me it was a rough start and it was something i wasn't used to i'd gone to two public schools even though i'd

14:45

gone to catholic grade school in high school but i adjusted i found a lot of support

14:51

and actually notre dame is what really set me on my career and dean link was the one that

14:58

recommended me for my job as a law clerk on the seventh circuit so

15:04

i just have and i continue to serve now on the board of trustees at notre dame but

15:09

that's my story thank you so much judge williams um

15:15

there's a question we've gotten here about imposterism that uh you got me thinking of as i was listening to your

15:20

answer but uh comparison of what are you weighing on what your experience

15:25

was like and um um i think that my experience here was

15:32

pretty good i um i had a random fascinator game too but not in like a hardship way i just

15:38

applied to like the top playing schools i didn't even know another day was in indiana so imagine my shop when i like

15:43

landed in south bend um but i stayed at notre dame because i found like a community here when i was walking

15:49

through the halls and admitted students stay i could tell that like professors really cared about their students i could tell the students heard about each

15:54

other um and so i stayed um i know later there's a question about like how people

16:00

being here and like having the largest flat class like affects law school and what that means um my class and this is

16:06

only like three years ago i had eight black students in it you're in class of like 200 people we had eight black

16:11

students so like in all of my first year classes i was like the only black kid in each class and i feel like that was more or

16:18

less sustained there could be more than two of us right in any section basically and so that was kind of alienating in

16:23

the sense that it's really easy to be like okay well everyone here has like everyone's like in the comments

16:30

talking about oh like this law firm and that law firm i didn't know any law firm today and they're like oh like john's

16:35

day and kirkland and i was like i don't want to get used to training i think like those are the only dogs that

16:40

i knew about like a fossil fuel defense attorney um so i think that there's a really big curveball when you get here like you

16:47

don't have that experience um like judge williams and um alvin and i were talking about i also

16:54

how many lawyers in my family my friends parents weren't really lawyers i think i had one friend who's out of the lawyer did like public like

17:00

insurance defense um so i didn't really have anyone to look up to like inspire me to become a lawyer so i got here like

17:06

i didn't know like how to read a case or i didn't know like how to do certain things and it felt like everyone else did and so i

17:12

think that that can really impact like how your imposter syndrome affects you um but i just kind of like kept playing

17:18

along and i learned how to read cases i kind of stuck to my own game i think that finding that support system asking

17:25

your professors questions like that really helps me i'm having a pretty good experience after the game so that's my

17:30

perspective great uh dinkle uh this is a question that uh you know

17:37

we're talking a lot about imposter syndrome we're talking a lot about being first gen and kind of coming from different

17:42

experiences and you can relate to a lot of that i know do you want to remark on any of what has been said so far well i

17:48

mean i think most of you heard my story um and you know i judge williams and i

17:54

commiserate all the time about having similar experiences uh coming up uh to law

18:01

school and then in law school so you know i grew up in the paris village housing projects in pittsburgh

18:07

pennsylvania my father worked in a steel mill my mother worked in the hospital

18:12

and um uh my mother actually had a a master's degree um uh working in the hospital she

18:18

had a master's degree in pharmacy uh but my dad didn't have a college degree and he uh worked in a steel mill during the

18:25

day uh and um went to college at night to become uh an engineer

18:32

and uh and i remember uh my dad would come home from the steel mill uh and my

18:37

mother wouldn't even let him in the house because he just smelled of sulfur and stuff so she made him take off his

18:43

clothes and scrub up in the basement before he could come up uh into the house uh and then you know

18:49

i'll never forget when my dad got his uh engineering degree it was a big celebration for us

18:54

and um from that day on he got a job uh with the same steel company but as an

19:00

engineer uh and he wore a suit every day and um and that that made a huge impression on

19:07

me because um uh even though uh uh some of the other engineers uh in fact he was the only

19:13

black engineer in the company uh even though some of the other engineers didn't wear a suit he wore a suit and he

19:19

impressed upon me that there are things that you've got to do in life like support your family and there are some

19:25

things you get to do uh like wear a suit um he worked in a job where he had to

19:31

support his family and he didn't get to wear a suit so when he got to wear a suit he wore one every day and for 22

19:38

years i was at stanford as a professor and i um the students were always talking about uh you know why why do you

19:45

wear a suit every day i i was the only stanford professor who wore suit every day and

19:50

it's because i appreciated what a suit symbolized for me and the message that it conveyed to my students um i got to

19:58

wear a suit uh when i got to law school i was just like judge williams um

20:04

uh i had never met uh a lawyer until the very first day of law school once my my civil procedure

20:12

professor was the very first uh lawyer i ever met i had no idea of

20:17

how to navigate law school i thought that the most important preparation this

20:23

just shows you my mindset i thought that the most important preparation i could have for law school

20:29

was to learn how to type i was terrified that i would be slower at typing than

20:34

the other uh students so while everybody else you know knew what to do the summer

20:40

before law school i took a typing class in the hopes that i would learn uh how to be a lawyer uh and how to

20:46

write like a lawyer just by being able to type faster um and uh just like uh judge williams i had

20:52

no idea that you had to do the reading on the first day um and uh and

20:58

and just like judge williams i got my clerkship not because i applied for

21:03

a clerkship i didn't know what a clerkship was i just had several professors

21:08

who reached reached down and made sure that i succeeded they weren't black professor i had no black

21:15

professors in in uh in law school so you have a different experience here than i had i

21:21

had no black professors i had um several uh white professors who reached

21:26

down and saw my potential and they insisted in fact they told me i was

21:32

going to clerk i didn't have a choice about it and they arranged for me to interview for a clerkship

21:38

and they made sure that i was prepared to do my clerkship once i

21:44

got there i never forget professor randy barnett who was my contracts professor

21:50

i've told you guys before he he uh he came up to me right at the beginning of

21:55

class one day and he said i want to see you in my office and i thought i had done something wrong and so i went to his office and i said

22:01

uh sir uh whatever i did i'll fix it just let me know he said no no he said i think you only think about being a law

22:07

professor he's the one who stayed with me and um

22:12

he gave me stuff to read outside of class gave me stuff to read on the side uh and then when it came time for a

22:19

courtship he helped uh to arrange for a courtship for me

22:24

and uh another his party words to me is uh you better not embarrass me

22:30

so um so i i i always uh i always try to do my my best and when it comes to

22:35

impostor syndrome and i'll just wrap up with this um uh uh one of the questions i saw was uh

22:42

uh did you ever experience imposter syndrome and uh how do you how did you overcome it um i i

22:49

experience impostor syndrome every day i have no idea why i'm here and i have no idea how i got here

22:56

i just know that uh god has blessed me and i'm just trying to do my best to

23:01

honor what the holy spirit has placed in my lap but every single day i don't know whether or not

23:08

um other people viewing me think i'm confident or not i just can't care about

23:14

that i've got to focus on what god has set before me and just try to do my best

23:21

to honor him and to honor the blessing that he placed in my lap uh uh i have uh i have a dinner tonight

23:28

with lord alton of the of the united kingdom house of lords uh i don't even know how to address him

23:34

like what do i say did your lordship you know i i i so um so you don't overcome imposter

23:41

syndrome something just stays with you um but you also can't let it defeat you you just have to you have to um you have

23:48

to go with the blessing that god has given you you know what you're saying and sort of what everyone's been saying is really kind of i mean it's sort of

23:55

building this image of succeeding and overcoming odds without necessarily having a lot of support one

24:00

of the questions i think is kind of an interesting question to talk about here is

24:06

how has the concept of each one teach one and the engagement of black professional mentorship shaped your

24:12

career and for those of y'all who aren't familiar with each one teach one it's an old black slogan that essentially uh

24:17

emerged during slave times where if you could learn to read then your drive was then to teach

24:23

another one to read so we could expand the learning uh mr mckenna uh why don't we start with

24:29

you so how has the concept of each one teach one um shaped your career and the engagement of

24:35

black mentorship well i you know i have this idea that was

24:41

instilled in me at notre dame that you have an obligation beyond being

24:47

a lawyer to do something for the community do something for others

24:54

and so a lot of time i've spent trying to mentor

24:59

people in our law firm younger people in the community

25:06

uh there have been some younger people who reached out to me from the law school

25:11

from balsa one one being a

25:18

fellow who just bugged the heck out of me about getting a summer clerkship

25:23

and finally i was able to arrange something for him uh he was with us for

25:29

a brief time until his wife made him move back to oklahoma and uh he's now a federal district judge

25:37

but uh i spent a lot of time just talking to people because

25:43

as as the dean and judge williams said you really

25:48

come from a circumstance where you don't know what it's all about and you have to learn you have to rely

25:54

on people and knowing that's how i got to where i've gotten

26:00

i i've tried to import impart that to others

26:06

and sometimes i i think maybe i should start a little bit lower than law school

26:12

and uh impart it to people in high schools

26:17

so that they'll know what they're going to be facing and whether this is something they want a

26:23

game they really want to get into uh it's it's not an easy job

26:30

but you you have to you have to learn

26:37

judge williams uh do you have uh any thoughts on this as well yeah and i want to go back to the imposter syndrome uh

26:44

because i yeah marcus and i are right on the same track because i felt like i was just like a fish out of water when i

26:50

came to notre dame but i built relationships i was not one of those people that went to the friday night

26:56

beer parties before the game you know the guys because my class there were seven of us they they played on the

27:02

intramural sports team so they got to know people and i can remember tommy mcgill ran for student bar a student bar

27:09

position and i was very much into balsa and i and i was very i think sort of

27:16

cloistered at least in that first year i joined the women's bar association

27:21

and i learned from that experience that what you have to do is be nurtured in

27:27

your soul by your affinity groups and then that strengthens you to get

27:33

engaged in the larger community and that was a lesson that eventually

27:38

uh penetrated the other thing i'll say because the dean was saying he was tagged for the clerkship same thing

27:45

happened to me dean link called me in i was like oh lord what have i done and

27:50

the dean said hey i got a call from luther swiger he's the chief judge of the seventh circuit he's a notre dame

27:56

grad he called me there have been very few women law clerks and no black women law clerks and

28:03

in his last year as chief he'd really like to hire someone and i thought about you

28:08

i i just want to pause a minute to see give talk about the lesson of

28:14

always trying to do your very very best because you never know who's looking at you you never know who's going to be the

28:20

one helping you out who's going to extend a hand and like the dean my mentors there were no black mentors at

28:27

the law school and so when it got posted that i got the clerkship

28:33

because i had done work in the center for civil rights i had a research position there and howard glickstein

28:39

recommended me for the job because he knew i could write i had taken taxation with the dean the dean was fascinated

28:45

with video cameras they had just come in that shows how long ago it was and i had

28:50

been involved in preparing hearings on police misconduct in south bend some an issue that never goes away i never knew

28:58

that dean had looked at me and so when it got posted that i got the clerkship i could hear some grousing by

29:04

some people in my class who you know she got it you know because she was black

29:09

so then i was like well you know what the dean could have easily said no judge

29:15

i have no one let me give you someone else let me suggest someone else but the dean

29:21

thought i could do it and so i one of the things we have to do

29:26

is put all that negative stuff that's not your issue that's not your issue so you have to

29:34

put that away and continue on the path we have to remain focused we have to think about

29:41

what our people did before us the challenges they face that we stand on their shoulders

29:48

and we have to move on because whatever we face pales in comparison to what they face so

29:56

in terms of helping i've always been a teacher like i said so i volunteered in

30:01

catholic high school teaching the grade school kids when i got to notre dame i

30:06

started a program in the public schools and we used to do little red riding hood and i would do a little trial to try to

30:12

explain to the kids they would act it out and we'd figure out if she had you know was breaking and entering the house of

30:19

the three bears i mean i've always been i i worked in the prisons because i

30:24

didn't take the moot court team which i should have which again dean was also

30:29

the ignorance i was like no legal aid we were going to go into prisons and teach the prisoners

30:36

how to write and do a book drive and everything because it hadn't dawned on me i needed that academic credential of

30:42

moot court i could also do that other project so i've always tried to reach out so

30:50

and it's so important because we are blessed children and we have the

30:55

obligation to give back and that teach one we reach one teach one and

31:03

being a different kind of lawyer at notre dame that was just emphasized and so when i graduated when i was a

31:10

baby lawyer only two years out i had well really the year i graduated there was a bar program that

31:17

ron kennedy at northwestern started for black students the pass rate for black students was about 30

31:24

i was in the commercial course met a north northwestern student he told me about the course that ron had

31:30

i was like well can i get in it so he went to ron ron said no you went to notre dame

31:36

so but i never forgot that and a couple years later i was in the u.s attorney's

31:41

office with a guy who graduated from northwestern i said is he still doing the program he said yes

31:47

i said is the pass rate still 100 he said yes i said well and is it still just northwestern he said yes i said

31:53

well can you like introduce me to him so i went to north to to meet kennedy with

31:59

al moran and i said you know i think you should expand it well he looked at me who who am i

32:04

and he's like he had a 100 pass rate he said uh uh no i'm really not inclined to do that because you know things are

32:11

going real well i said well what if i put a group of my friends together you train us we have a non-northwestern

32:16

group and we see how it goes we had the same pass rate and we formed

32:22

minority legal education resources inc and uh more than 5 000 students of all

32:29

racess have taken that course and it was always like that and now the law schools refer students

32:36

to us so i like to tell that because other things i've started like the black women

32:42

lawyers association or just the beginning pipeline organization that addresses just what al said from grade

32:49

school through law school i did this mla as a baby lawyer so it

32:55

shows you the power that you can have if you have an idea i believe in the power of one

33:00

the power of one to affect change and i think notre dame enforces

33:07

and and and supports that concept that we have the power

33:14

and then you just gather all these ones with you and then you can make change so that's the impact notre dame had on me

33:21

the reach one teach one as well as a special kind of lawyer a different kind

33:27

of lawyer if i could add something i i think it's curious that both the dean

33:35

and judge williams talked about being tapped for clerkships and i

33:42

i still remember being in the library one time

33:48

in the afternoon and behind me i hear this very deep voice and it was

33:53

dean o'meara who had one of the deepest voices in the world for a particularly a

33:59

short guy mr mckenna he comes up yes dean

34:04

what did i do as the two of you said and he said how'd you like to go to

34:11

columbus ohio i said i've never been there deep i wouldn't know what it's like

34:17

you said well i have a friend who may be getting appointed as a federal judge and he's going to need a law clerk

34:23

i'll tell him about you i guess what i would impress the students with is

34:29

don't ignore the professors black or white they are people that are going to

34:36

recognize something in you and when you get out you have the obligation to do the same

34:42

thing as judge williams said it's it is each one teach one

34:49

each one reach down and pull somebody up uh i

34:55

i couldn't emphasize that anymore i so appreciate what both of you said

35:02

here you know we're talking about this idea of each one teach one and what everyone's mentioning about sort of

35:07

getting tapped for an opportunity i just want to stop on something that judge williams said i thought was really

35:12

important the idea of i've gotten the opportunity and the people around me are probably thinking oh she got it because

35:18

she was black or you know this idea of affirmative action got you there you didn't get there on your own merit uh

35:25

and i want to ask uh eugene cole and you parents to comment on this first but what advice do you have for students who

35:31

are contending with either the truth of that or the perception in their own minds that people are looking at me and

35:38

they're thinking that what i have and what i've achieved isn't based on my qualifications but it's based on the way

35:43

that i look i think you can start first um i think that's tough because that's

35:50

definitely something that i still struggle with so i don't know if i can tell you how to overcome it but i will say that i think this has been

35:57

emphasized by everyone today is that you kind of have to do your own thing you can't really care about like what people

36:02

think or like why they think that you're doing x y and z um you just have to do your own work do the work get your job

36:09

and like as long as you're doing well those things it doesn't matter like why they think that you're succeeding if you know that you're succeeding and you like

36:14

you know that you're smart i'm like they can't take that away from you right so like when you leave here and you go to your first job you go to your clerkship

36:21

and like you're walking around wondering like am i supposed to be here like you can have people be like oh like she

36:26

only came to she went to notre dame like they went to higher schools or like that you're a person of color and like no one else around you is but like you know

36:32

that you went to a good law school and you know that you've been in the work and that you know what you're talking about so like no one can take that from

36:37

you unless you left them right and so one thing that i learned being a lawyer for like only like six or seven months

36:43

is that like everyone is still kind of winging it and so when i used to be really intimidated talking to partners

36:48

or senior associates i kind of realized that we're all just kind of walking around doing the best that we can and so as long as you're walking around doing

36:55

the best that you can do and like using the knowledge that you know you have it doesn't really matter what people think or like what they might reason as like

37:01

why you're being successful or not um and you have to take that the same way your failures right so you can't make

37:07

your own failures worse because you're a person of color or because you're a woman or anything like that um because everyone fails so your failures aren't

37:13

any worse than anyone else's and i think that's also something that i still struggle with but i have to tell

37:19

myself like every single day um so i think that that's really important to keep in mind what was that eleanor

37:24

roosevelt quote uh no one can make you feel inferior without your consent yeah like you gotta just like walk around

37:29

like that honestly otherwise it's gonna get single yeah so yeah i was um very uh

37:36

deeply influenced by my father um and i asked him once why he went to engineering school

37:42

and uh he said hey you know he you know he went to college in the 60s and 70s

37:48

and he said that the great thing about engineering was that there's a right answer mathematics provides a right

37:55

answer and a wrong answer and it's not subjective and it's not subject to racism

38:00

and it struck two things struck me about that one was you know he's right that you go into a field that

38:07

is uh mathematical or scientific there's there's just one right answer and a lot of wrong answers and racism can't change

38:16

that outcome but it also suggested to me that uh his choice his life's choices were shaped by

38:23

the the the racial constructs of the society that he lived in and um

38:31

uh somebody asked me the other day about um uh how how it is that i raised so much

38:38

money so so one of the things i love about my job is raising money um i

38:43

absolutely love raising money and i have the generosity of uh al and wendy

38:48

mckenna to thank for uh uh uh some of that money that we've raised

38:53

um but um uh the thing i love so

38:59

so uh i i experienced this all the time you know i'm the first black being here uh is he being chosen because he's black

39:06

um i i don't i don't think about that i'm a hyper competitive person what i do

39:12

think about is that black or white i've raised more money in two and a half

39:18

years than any dean has raised in 10 years in law school in fact in my first

39:24

year as dean i raised more money as the dean of the law school than any

39:30

dean has raised for any college or school here at notre dame ever

39:35

and what i love about that is that fundraising is a scorecard it doesn't

39:40

ask whether i raise the most money as a black bean or as a white bean i raise the most money

39:46

and when i walk into a dean's meeting they know it right and if they don't know it i let them

39:52

know

40:02

i don't even think about it uh if if they think that i'm inferior or while i was chosen for dean because i'm black

40:09

that's their problem uh their other problem is that they're gonna have to keep up with it

40:14

so can i can i just comment too on uh this uh you know you were you said

40:21

you're struggling with i think we've all talked about how you just go for the excellence and it's the issue is the

40:27

other others so i always think about well because i i also started this program called

40:33

jumpstart in chicago where i have all the chicago area and all the illinois law schools now

40:40

where we get admitted students to three weeks before school starts and we try to tell them the basics and the

40:47

fundamentals in a different way than orientation and so one of the things i talk about is the chit

40:54

and so to me this is a way to wrap your head around that everybody has a jet

41:00

the notre dame law school class when people are admitted you want to have people that are from

41:06

iowa that maybe have been raised on the farm you want to have people who've been in

41:11

metropolitan areas you want to have people maybe that have been in the military you want to have

41:17

people that have come from a catholic education i mean there are people who their

41:24

parents went to notre dame their uncle went to notre dame they got all of those are kids

41:30

okay because there's something special about everyone that allows them to be in the

41:36

class and to me us being black is just like another chip

41:41

so do not devalue what we bring to the table because when

41:46

we talk about diversity we want diverse cases from all perspectives and that's

41:52

always helped me the second thing i wanted to say is you know i talked about affinity groups

41:58

and how important that is and so let's get our strength and i think the dean would agree with this too i know his

42:04

story but sometimes we have to say yes when we think no when people see the

42:10

potential like alvin said so i'll give you an example you know i have been teaching trial ad at northwestern for

42:17

years i love trial advocacy i was in the u.s attorney's office and i got tapped to teach at the attorney

42:23

general's trial advocacy school i had a heavy caseload i was like i don't think i have time to teach but i went and

42:31

every time they asked i did when i went on the bench i got a call

42:37

from the federal judicial center i love case management and they were like we'd like you to come and teach case

42:42

management to the baby judges so for seven years it didn't matter what was going on i would recess a trial to go

42:49

teach you know ultimately i became a member of a judicial conference committee because

42:55

i love case management i love that committee judges from all across the country and the chair came to me and he

43:01

said it's time for me to step down i think you should be the next chair i had led some subcommittees

43:07

and i you know we were at a cocktail party i was like bob i know you're joking he said no i'm not

43:12

joking i think you should be the first chair you should be the chair now i was the first black woman to ever

43:19

chair a judicial conference committee and so when i went home i thought about it i'm like bob thinks i can do it like

43:25

maybe i can do it and like is there anybody else around that will get this opportunity i'm not saying this out of

43:31

ego you know that not out of ego but i looked around and there was nobody else black on the committee that had the

43:38

experience i said i can do this i did that all those things i got tapped by

43:44

you will he started the federal judges association i was a young baby judge i was busy it was the quadrennial

43:50

conference he said i think you should go to the meeting i said i can't go to the meeting my case load i can't do it i

43:56

can't do it hugh went i didn't know he was going to nominate me as treasurer

44:01

but i ended up being treasurer two terms eventually became president-elect and then president of the federal judges

44:07

association now a membership of over 1100 federal judges so i say that to say

44:15

we have to say yes when an opportunity comes even with it may seem inconvenient and
44:20
to show you that you never know who's watching and and how important it is to me to
44:28
build those leadership skills so you can be an effective force in the larger
44:34
community so i don't have any problem with people who say hey i want to practice i'm going
44:40
to practice in my own community i want to go back to the black community i want to have you
know i want those to be my
44:46
clients that's fabulous but i also think because of the knowledge you gain
44:52
you have a voice that can be a part of the larger society voice i just wanted
44:59
to get that in because i think it's so important that we stand up and that we say yes to
opportunities and
45:06
be open to opportunities completely agree we have about 15
45:13
minutes left and there's just one more question that i want to ask before we uh open it up to
y'all to see if you have
45:18
any questions to ask our panelists but uh and this is specifically for uh our two panelists on
zoom and for you
45:25
paris you know we're we're living in a time of significant divide in the country and we've seen
you
45:32
know in 2020 a racial reckoning with the black lives matter movement a lot of
45:37
racial justice protests um you know it's a really unique time to be alive and also i think
45:43
the um you know people of color in the practice of law um but in a climate like
45:48
this what is the significance of the law school um having a black dean for the
45:54
first time as well as having the largest black class in and r1l's
46:00
and mr mckenna if you would like to start i would say it's significant
46:08
in both respects but the significance as great as dean cole
46:14
is the significance is going to be the next one

46:19

and the next class will this continue we don't need

46:27

as great a job as the dean is doing and has done with fundraising and everything else

46:33

is that going to be yet for a black administrator of this law school

46:41

having whatever the number is of black law students in the current first

46:48

year class is that going to stop i i think the whole thing is we it's got

46:55

to keep moving forward we can't rest on what has already happened

47:02

uh so while it is significant the significance is yet to come

47:10

is it going to keep up uh and i realize there have only been 11

47:15

deans of the law school so it and i'm not chasing you away dean

47:21

cole but it may be a while before your there's your successor or a

47:27

successor to your successor but it's got to be

47:33

based on the record that the dean has done there's no problem with having a

47:39

black dean there's no problem with having a lot of black students in the class

47:49

i i always say something that i think people will probably wince at

47:55

i would love when it comes time that while we

48:00

honor our heritage and our ethnicity that a person is not known as a black

48:07

lawyer from notre dame they're known as a lawyer from notre dame

48:12

because that that color thing disappears and that's what we need to have happen

48:18

that while it's significant and it should continue

48:26

we shouldn't have it be the measuring stick

48:31

and as i think judge williams said we shouldn't run away from

48:37

our heritage we should embrace it

48:44

and now shut up uh jeff williams your thoughts

48:50

yeah i want to pick up that point that alvin made and i agree with him you know and i think the dean is making moves

48:57

to change the law school as an institution the the creation of your office

49:03

the fundraising which i dean we haven't even talked about what some of your plans are but of course there's power in

49:10

raising that money there are chairs that can be appointed there's faculty that can be brought in

49:16

and of course any law faculty has to represent the range of views there is a

49:23

an atmosphere where students are actually like getting to know each other there is value in the numbers

49:30

there is value in the numbers because after all it should be people to people alvin as

49:36

you said reaching out to one another the color shouldn't be a barrier but let's face it we've come from many of us

49:44

segregated silos so you have kids in the class that have never like sat next to a black person or

49:51

a person any person of color have no idea what the people are like except what they've seen

49:58

on tv in the media and that kind of thing so part of i think what the dean's

50:04

challenge is is to get people to relate to each other in a real way and to really see each

50:11

other because of course everybody has a story so we talked about our story with

50:16

our parents so it could be that your people are irish and they were dealing with the potato famine in ireland and

50:22

they came over your people are victims of the holocaust or your people are coming from

50:28

very slave-like conditions in mexico and migrant farmers or whatever the

50:34

situation is but we're all here because our parents and those behind us

50:41

sacrificed so we could all be here so we could all be here so that human condition is a common condition and

50:48

maybe i'm like a pollyanna because i'm always thinking that things can change and it is a very very

50:55

hard time now but i think a lot of it is because because people stay siloed so to

51:02

me one of the things that dean and what he symbolizes and because he stands for such excellent

51:08

is a recognition that we do belong at notre dame that we do contribute that we

51:14

have made great contributions and that we can move forward so i i

51:19

think it's been significant because i mean when he told me the numbers i mean he's admitted more people in his last

51:26

class and we had the whole three years i was at notre dame and it makes a difference in terms of

51:32

how we feel but i think it makes a difference on all the school the students in the in in the in the law

51:38

school because they're having to partner with blacks and and they're having to be in study

51:44

groups and doing all these things together and that brings understanding can can i add one more thing i you know

51:51

i did judge williams mentioned affinity groups and i think that's all great

51:59

but the other thing i would encourage is all the black students shouldn't sit at

52:04

the lunch table together they they should do what judge williams is just

52:10

hit on is you got to get to know the other people and you got to get the other

52:16

ethnics the other races and they need to get to know you that you are not some

52:23

wild-eyed whatever it is that's portrayed on television

52:28

but you're a human being just like them with some of the same concerns

52:34

same fears and the same abilities and they're not going to get you get to

52:40

know you if you just stay with your affinity group

52:47

paris you uh mentioned earlier but uh what are your thoughts um so i agree that

52:53

having a really large falsehood class is only as significant as you make it so if you keep doing it

52:59

that's really great but it's also not just about admitting a large number of black students also making sure they succeed right so there's no point in

53:06

having 30 of you at this school if only like 10 of you get jobs like are successful right that's just like media

53:12

quota so i think that in order for that to really matter like they need to like the university has to invest in black

53:18

students to say when they invest in other groups here um is there is a like misallocation of resources at

53:24

notre dame i think that we all see it in some places and so i think that for that to like mean something that you

53:29

have people to not only get black students here and then invest in them while they're here if you don't invest

53:35

in them then like they would be better off going like literally any other school and like being around more black people

53:42

translating that into the legal world i think that given everything that's happened since 2020 there is a larger

53:48

push among law firms to recruit more diverse students to have more difficulty

53:54

and equity initiatives within the law firms themselves um i can choose from my firm like we have a whole consulting

53:59

group now where we do diversity equity training for our clients because it's so important to clients that like the

54:04

lawyers they work with are diverse so there's so many opportunities that have come up out of the pandemic and out of

54:10

all the racial like injustice and like unrest um i think that like it's on all

54:15

of you to take advantage of it but the opportunities are out there and i think that's like really great um but that

54:20

requires you to use the resources that your name has and for the notre dame to give you those resources so like i said

54:26

um i love that there's more than eight of you because that was a really isolating experience and it's like while i got to know the other seven black

54:33

students at your game really well it would have been nice to have more of us and that's really great but it doesn't matter if you guys don't get to succeed

54:40

the same way that other students here succeed so i think that the significance will be shown by like how successful you

54:46

guys are and making sure that they're getting forced into you um so i think that's how it can be really important

54:52

diversity without equity and inclusion is just window dressing exactly yeah mark except for this better give you a

54:59

chance to comment on any of this so um i i you know i i um i can only

55:04

reinforce everything that's been said so far um i think that the way uh you know al

55:10

mckenna makes a great point this can this cannot be a a blip on

55:16

on the timeline this this has to be the start of something uh new the the way we got the large uh

55:25

uh diversity that we got in this class at the lgbtq diversity the the uh the

55:32

increase in balsa students all of the diversity we got this year was largely

55:37

through the efforts of students making phone calls to admitted students so for

55:42

this to continue it can't just be my effort it has to be um it has to be your effort

55:48

you i need you uh to help uh now i don't want to put an extra burden on you um but if you

55:56

believe in this place and believe in the direction we're going um it's to your benefit to help uh help

56:03

in the recruiting effort the other thing i want to say is um uh

56:08

i was at i was in los angeles a month ago um uh speaking to a large group of uh

56:15

donors and i got a question out of the audience from a donor who said you know i give a lot of money to notre dame

56:22

and um my uh my son applied to notre dame uh law school out and didn't get in how

56:29

come i'm not getting recognized uh for um what i've given to notre dame

56:36

and i said well you know um i appreciate that you've given to notre dame but the truth of the matter is as an alum of

56:43

notre dame um you you went here 20 years ago or more

56:49

right 30 years ago and you had a child um

56:55

if i let in the children of all alumni who went here 20 or 30 years ago guess what notre dame

57:02

would look like right now it would look like it looked 30 years ago

57:08

i can't do that because that's not the world we live in anymore so i appreciate

57:13

your donation but your donation should be because we are trying to train a

57:18

different kind of lawyer not trying to train your prodigy right we are not trying to have the notre dame of 30

57:26

years ago and the other thing i told them was that you have the resources

57:31

go get some test prep to get your child up to the standard because the fact of the

57:37

matter is and what people don't want to believe but is true is that we do not lower the admission

57:44

standards for anybody you are here because you qualified under

57:50

our admission standards and the reason why you chose us was because we may have

57:55

shown you more love than other uh law schools but no one lowered any

58:02

admission standards for you and if anything the admission standards only get lower

58:07

when i get a call from the uh development office by the way they stopped calling me they stopped calling

58:13

me about a year ago but i told them don't call me about like some donor's child because we admit 180 students a

58:21

year and if i take your donor's child there's no way that we're going to maintain the excellence of this place

58:28

there is nobody here in this first year class who did not meet our admission standards not a single person and that

58:36

includes children of alumni if if you're an alum and your your child is applying

58:42

to notre dame law school they will get in not because you're an alum but because they met our standards

58:48

and if they don't get in it's because they didn't you know and it's just that so

58:54

uh on that note um looks like we don't have any more time for questions we're just at 1 30 but please everyone join me

59:01

in thanking all of our panelists for [Applause]

59:11

thank you very much judge williams and mr mckenna thank you paris and thank you again um and thank

59:19

all of you i hope you enjoyed the chick-fil-a as much as we enjoyed the conversation and please enjoy the rest of your day