

Black History Month Leadership Series



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FUN FACT

“I am trying to regain proficiency in Spanish in hopes of retiring there one day, I watch Spanish comedies (with Spanish subtitles of course), my favorite thus far has been “Grumpy Christmas” (still not sure why the title isn’t in Spanish)”

What inspired you to get into the finance industry?

My path to corporate finance, just like my path to law, generally was quite unorthodox. I’ve always been fascinated with numbers and thought about being an astronaut or an engineer when I was growing up. As a math major planning to graduate a year early from the University of Virginia (early graduation, dumb decision, I now know), I decided to apply to law school while studying abroad in Valencia, Spain. I was a first-generation college (and law student) and I didn’t have any lawyers in my family, though I was slightly addicted to Perry Mason shows (aging myself, I know). I honestly applied to law school because I knew that I wasn’t quite ready for the work world and friends suggested that I’d be a good lawyer because I talked a lot. After getting to law school I realized that I loved all of the classes that dealt with business and finance, from contracts to tax to bankruptcy law. When I started at Hunton Andrews Kurth, I was a general corporate lawyer and there were lots of corporate associates but not as much work to go around, so I started moonlighting on the securitization team (which was always going gangbusters) at the suggestion of Amy Williams (SFA Board Member). At the time, securitization wasn’t really on my radar (or even in my vocabulary), but it didn’t take long for me to see that my love of numbers and problem solving made diagramming transactions and deciphering waterfalls seem like a dream. Within a few months I transitioned fully to the securitization team, which shockingly was almost 25 years ago.

How do you help support DEI initiatives at your organization?

I am honored to serve as one of the firmwide hiring partners, and I am currently a member of the firm’s Executive Committee after previously serving on a number of Diversity and Inclusion related subcommittees at the firm. In these leadership roles I have been able to develop and collaborate on programs and initiatives focused on creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce. I am especially proud of the Diversity Hackathon (a *Shark-Tank* style competition first launched during the pandemic summer of 2020) that I helped create to allow our firm to leverage the intellect and ingenuity of our summer clerks on an issue that has challenged the legal industry for some time and that is the lack of diversity in the legal profession. I also was involved in the creation of our 1L Diversity Champion program, which is open to all 1Ls, where we are seeking to recruit individuals who have demonstrated a robust commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their personal and professional lives. This is important to us as we seek future firm leaders who value diversity, equity, and inclusion. The 1L Diversity Champion program allows our 1L clerks to spend up to four weeks of their 10-week summer program with one of our corporate clients.

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What does Black History Month mean to you?

For me, it is a time to recommit to taking action and doing whatever I can from where I sit to serve my community. And a critical part of my service is using my platform and privilege to elevate the voices of the marginalized. For me, Black History Month is also a time of remembering the hardships and sacrifices of those who came before me who made it even possible for me to become a Chambers-ranked partner at Hunton, a place I have been proud to call home since I graduated from law school almost 25 years ago.

What can industry leaders do to increase diversity in finance?

Reevaluate their hiring criteria and presumptions regarding indicators of success. Too often we rely on hard and fast (and questionably objective) metrics that don't tell the full story about a prospect's potential to succeed. We also need to be open and willing to cast a wider net to find talent. Great talent resides in all tiers and quartiles of universities and law schools. We need to be creative, resourceful, and strategic in identifying talent as well as providing more equitable access and exposure to all demographics to careers in finance.

What keeps you motivated to continue to grow in this profession?

The fact that there aren't more of me. Black female law firm partners have been jokingly referred to as "unicorns." I am hoping that the diversity initiatives that my firm, SFA, and other likeminded organizations have developed, as well as my own professional achievements, will make the path easier for others like me - and people of color generally - to access and excel in the finance industry.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about how we can all work to make the finance industry more diverse, equitable, and inclusive?

We need to all be willing to call out injustice, even if it seems unpopular. Those who know me well know one of my favorite quotes is one of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which is "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." That quote goes on to say that, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." My other suggestion, which I mentioned on a panel for [SFA's 2nd Annual DEI Symposium](#) [Investing in Allyship: Agency in Action](#) is to encourage leaders to be willing to invest in someone who doesn't share your same background or interests. There is a natural tendency to mentor and sponsor "mini-me's." We need to fight this urge with all our might as the success of our industry depends on diversity of thought, background, and perspective.

This interview has been edited for clarity.