

Javona Braxton. University of Virginia. Class of 1999

Agnes Redvil

The first question is just to tell me a few things about yourself, like your family, where you're from, and like things that you like to do for fun.

Javona Braxton

Sure. So I am originally from Richmond, Virginia, and I actually moved back to Richmond in the early 2000s. So, um, you know, Richmond is where I was born and raised my family's here, but I've been blessed enough just with my career to be able to travel outside of the state and live in a couple other places, but still kind of calling Richmond my home base, I am single, which is, you know, unique, I'm 44. So I don't mind telling you my age, because hopefully, I still look young. But you know, outside of work, my work is related to diversity, inclusion and belonging. And so, you know, I'll just say specifically for UVA, went to UVA and university (achievement?) scholarship back in the 90s, had a wonderful experience. And for me, it was always, I felt it was my responsibility as an alum to ensure that the black voice remain a part of the conversation of what alumni from the University of Virginia represented. And so that's been my commitment. I've served on a variety of different boards at UVA, that still is my passion. I'm chair black Alumni, have been for a number of years. And so just again, making sure that our voices and our impact within the university history outside of the slavery context, because that's, that's typically the first thing that kind of comes up, but really expanding the impact of our history beyond what most people know about Mr. Jefferson's University.

But for fun, you know, in COVID, that looks a little bit different. Um, you know, like I said, I'm single, so I live alone. So it's been operated within the bubble of my other single friends, of just making sure they were safe, but still having fun, you know, I'm 44, I'll actually be 44 on Tuesday. And, I mean, we hate what kind of younger people my best friend and now she's 45, I'm 44. And that, that just keeps us young, she went to UVA, too. So it's just a matter of just living life and just finding the joy in every moment. Even during COVID like I said, we pretty much stayed within our bubble, and just made a commitment to make sure that we weren't not living considering everything that was happening around us. So, um, so yeah, so that could be you know, I started a charcuterie business in the midst of COVID. Amazing grades ba. So just just little things, but to me, it's all about having fun and making sure that the dash and life counts.

Agnes Redvil

Great. Did you meet your friend at UVA?

Javona Braxton

So my best friend, yes, we were in the same sorority. So that's how we became best friends through our sorority. So she's class of 98 on class of 99.

Agnes Redvil

That's very cool.

Javona Braxton

And really, honestly, my friend network is so funny, the majority of my friends I met at UVA, they want to think of you know, lifespan. And I have one, you probably just start my phone ring. Like I have like my core roommate group from like, my second year, like we were in a thread and we text every day and really during COVID we laugh because one of our girlfriends, she lived in Atlanta for a long time, she just moved to Pittsburgh, like I said, I know Richmond have another friend of Richmond and another friend of Maryland and we hadn't virtual happy hours to make sure that we had a really good see each other before COVID. And now in COVID, like we're closer than ever that we have is we graduated in 99. And so, um, you know, but all of my core friends sisterhood group, like that's all UVA.

Agnes Redvil

I recently assembled a group for, to have roommates for an apartment for my second year and we have a group chat and everything. So I'm only hoping that like our relationship together develops into something as great as that.

Javona Braxton

If I'm lucky enough, I may be able to find you a picture from our second year we lived in Copley, that's where we that's where we kind of started out so like I said, I was from Richmond. I had a friend that I was inroads with that Shaundra so she was from Richmond also. And so I was in a program that I knew somebody from New Jersey. And that's how I met my friend Rhonda. And she lived in where no these dorms don't even exist anymore. So it doesn't matter but she lived in one dorm across the hall lived this girl Nadia who, her mom and my mom went to high school together in Richmond, but we never knew each other. But we did all the same thing. She cheered, I cheered just. So that's our core, like we call it the roomy, roomy group. So that's how we kind of started at UVA first year. And like I said, there's texting now, so

Yeah, but I mean, it really is when I think of like, even beyond like my Sorority Life, which is still pretty significant. And important, um, just the tight knit nature of specifically, just the black community, especially when you think of women, that is a valuable component of my identity. And the experience that I had at UVA, and even life beyond UVA. I sit on a board and we were talking with potential first years this past weekend. And everybody said the same thing. Like if I need a professional reference, if I need to seek out any type of resource that typically is a UVA grad that I'm calling, just to get some

insight. So that is, I think, the power of the UVA network. And just the diversity of the experience that you can have on grounds and even when you leave.

Agnes Redvil

Now I'd like to ask you more about like your UVA story, as a student there. Um, so how did you choose to go to UVA, what you did or studied? How like, welcoming, it was maybe like, your first year, and he said, You were in a sorority, so like, you can talk a bit about your Greek life there.

Javona Braxton

That's a lot. Oh, let's see. So how did I choose UVA? Um, you know, I was salutatorian in my high school class. And, like, I knew the options, but I went to a predominantly white predominantly, there was literally one white kid in my graduating class one. So growing up in Richmond, just the experience that I had, it just was not as diverse as I knew that the world was like, I wouldn't be in more diverse mixes of students. Like imagine the summer programs or something like that from across the city, but my particular High School. And let me pause there. So again, I went to Richmond public schools in the city of Richmond, in eighth grade, I was tapped to get a scholarship to go to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. And that was the plan up until I watched an after school special about a black kid who again, who had gone to Andover Academy, which is like their rival school, and he was killed. And so for me, in my mind, I'm like, yeah, Javona will not be going to Phillips Exeter Academy. So I was kind of for high school kind of left in this scramble up, okay. Because that didn't apply like to the Governor's School or anything like that. It was okay. So what are you going to do for high school, so I went to and it no longer exists. It was a gifted and talented program, alternative high school that was housed inside of a public school in Richmond and the Northside original college, Marshall High School. So the program was the John Marsh alternative high school. And so thinking about schools, I mean, college was always, especially when you were in that program, like it wasn't an option, so you weren't going to college. And I knew that for me.

So looking at schools, I had kind of just, of course, it to me going to an HBCU would have been going to the 13th grade, in my mind that was just based off of my experience. And I know a lot of other people think of if you go to a predominately white High School, then you want the HBCU experience, I wanted to choose the PWI so that I had a better understanding of what I considered the real world so that I knew when I got into corporate America that I understood the mentality that I understood how I fit in how I show up, as opposed to me going to HBCU to me still would have been living in a fairy tale. And that to me, is that how I wanted to prepare myself. And so I chose UVA early I was early decision. My cousin who is like a brother to me, he graduated in 94. So he was already on grounds. And so you know, I got to experience like Spring Fling and all these different things early because he was on right home. So it was an easy decision. But back then when you did early decision like it was binding like you had decided to say I want apply to any other school or whatever. And I was fine with that. Because I knew I loved UVA. It was far enough to be away while I knew like my mother wouldn't show up at my door, like Hey, girl, what you doing? Um, and just the diversity Other experiences students that you had to engage with, I mean, there were children of diplomats and we went to school with is just a wide variety of

students. And at that point, just the black experience was extremely different than what it is now. Um, it to me was, you know, when you think of like this whole concept of HBCU, it really was, in terms of population, we were like, 13%, African American students back then. So it was the opportunity to really build community within the black community, but you still had the space to be able to have experiences outside of that tight knit black community. Um, so yeah, I got the grounds in 1995. And then, like I said, I graduated in 1999. And so while I was on grounds, you know, I did a lot of stuff. Um, and, for me, it was about, again, that mix of doing or showing up in spaces where people don't expect the black girl to show up, right. Um, and so like I said, I was within everything, I was committed to admissions, because I was chairing the Black Student admissions committee. I wasn't married to a Black Student Alliance. I wasn't black voices. But then also just Student Council also volunteered the Madison house. And I also helped start a program at the Women's Center. So like I said, it was to me about having the best of both worlds, of having that home base, if you will, within the black community, but ensuring that I got the best out of what the UVA experience was supposed to be about.

Socially, I mean, like I said, it was, I think I had a good balance. Like, I think about one of my mentors, he graduated in the 80s whenever he sees me, and he's like, I'm always proud of you the balance that you had socially and academically, you know, so that's just, you know, what I made of it and that's, I think UVA also, um, you know, you ask the question of, you know, was UVA or how did I feel, UVA kind of welcomes me. And I still say this one parents and students ask this question. And especially now to August 12, from was that 2017 still comes out right? At the end of the day, UVA is only but a smaller microcosm of society. And so when you begin to think of the ills and perils that still exist outside of that proverbial Ivy gates of UVA, like you can't expect the institution to serve you a false reality of what's not outside of the ivy walls. I remember my second year, actually sitting at the black bus stop sitting at the BBs. And there was a news reporter from CBS. Like the evening news, and he was doing a feature. So at that point, his book had just come out white, all the black kids sit together in the cafeteria. And at that point, UVA had the reputation of being the most segregated institution in the south. And so he was there like examining, but on the flip side of that, and I'll tell you, you know, these funny stories later, but, you know, Abercrombie and Fitch used to come to UVA to do their screen shoot, like it was the beauty of the grounds, but then everybody was beautiful on grounds as well. So they will come get models from UVA, they will do to shoot the UVA. So there's also like, when you think of like privilege, it's like, the pretty privilege existed at UVA, along with a lot of other privileges. They came before UVA. But you know, back to the whole new story piece like that was, again, that's how we had to exist. When you when you think of, you know, with space can you make for yourself at a PWI if there still is the dominance of another group of people in terms of how you still show up as marginalized. But it's a matter of how you choose to see the opposite side of the experience by way of your privilege as well.

And that privilege being of getting one of the most quality education or degrees possible in the country. Like you also have to show it with that when you think of going out, let's say into the Charlottesville community and that was something that we deal with all the time. And half of it was our fault because we call the people in Charlottesville town. So when we would go out into the Charlottesville community, you as the black student, to those black and African American people from Charlottesville. You were the same people that when you looked at White people on grounds and that thought process it was just marginalized communities' goals and upon marginalized communities and at the end of the day, like I mean there is no trophy for how marginalized you are showing up right. So I mean it still is a reflection again, of The metallicities I mean, they were sitting, I'm at that point, we were always in constant

struggle with UVA police. Oh, AAA like they tried to arrest him for like trespassing. Um, I mean, I think during my time on grounds, I remember like maybe two or three sit-ins, half of them were because of the behaviors of Charlottesville police or UVA police. So I mean, I think that experience, it demonstrated how you have to make sure that your voice is heard, and that your experiences are valued, because, you know, otherwise, people and especially as it relates to UVA, people will continuously try to put you in a box of the only connection that black people have to UVA is Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings and slavery. Right. And that's just not it when you think of, and especially women impact that we had in terms of service on grounds, leadership, in a variety of capacities, etc. Which I guess leads me because you asked about sorority so I pledge Delta Sigma Theta sorority, Incorporated Kaprow chapter UVA.

And again, it was one of those things of, you know, life kind of checklist, like I knew that I wanted to play just already, I knew that that was going to be delta. And just by way of influencing the women in my family, and then all of my teachers educators growing up, they were primarily all deltas. And then when I got to UVA, I always tell the story, my first year, how I gone to this party, it just plays they no longer exist on Main Street, I lose my ID my first or second week in school, at a Delta party. And then the Delta, actually, she brought my ID back to my dorm, it was just fun, I was just like, Oh my gosh, but then when you looked around grounds, like the members of the capraro chapter, they were, again, leading Student Council, they were just heavy presence, both within the black community, but just in a general UVA community as well. And so, um, for me, it was the mystery of being in a sorority, and everything that came along with it in terms of like, I have an older brother. So I didn't grow up with sisters, it was something that, you know, I always envied, my mother had five sisters. So, you know, the opportunity to be able to build sister sisterhood. But then also, I think the other thing that I learned about being in a sorority everything in terms of how I show up professionally, absolutely learned by the nm sorority in terms of running a sorority, and just general practice of how I demonstrate my professionalism. Um, and so I think that's an experience that, you know, if every woman has the opportunity to go through some type of engagement with a sorority during their college years, they'll say, hey, like, I mean, that's why they exist. And so, I mean, there's so many other ways that I had the opportunity to be engaged on grounds, but that sounds stands out, because outside of my lifelong commitment that I make as an alum, and making sure that I stay engaged, like that's still my second connection to UVA. Um, so

Agnes Redvil

That's really interesting. I already feel like I'm learning a lot from you. I feel like I can make a lot of like connections.

Javona Braxton

Like I said, I'm typically if you ask people, you know, people always like, thank you for making sure you know, because I guess I've been chair for black Alumni Weekend. I said, I'm president Ryan's African American Alumni Council. You know, I've just been engaged because like I said, I feel like our stories are relevant beyond the narrative of we built the university. And that while I think that is important, I also feel that the importance of the untold stories of experiences of black students at UVA also is impactful

when you look at the retrospect of again, yes, we built this university, but we also have had significant impact and continue to shape the university for the experience that it lives.

Agnes Redvil

I heard that you studied sociology and African American Studies. Was that like a double major?

Javona Braxton

Yes, I double majored in sociology and African American Studies and then they basically kicked me out to the Comm school when I finished taking all the non-Comm classes you can take, um, I think when I got so I was pre law in my mind. Um, that's that was that was the goal like, Oh, go to law school because again, smart black girl like that's what you could do without really thinking about other career options, right. Um, so I think the intent was to major in government until I think I took Larry Salvador's class and then you I took Paul Kingston sociology one on one class, and I was like, This is my life, right? Um, because I always was an observer of culture, how people reacted to certain situations how they treated each other how, again, me growing up as a black girl in Richmond, Virginia, but just again, wanting to know more about other cultures, how that impacted how people lived. And just the conversations we had in that first class, where I think definitely impacted how I selected my major.

And so for me, it was putting a major together that provided space for me to mix, learning more about my culture and learning more about how society examines behaviors, norms, etc. But then also making sure that if I had a path and the corporate world, that I had that calm background, as well, I have friends who, you know, apply to the common school didn't get in, that was never me, I was like, that's never, that was never the aspiration because I had the other pieces that I wanted to tie in in terms of how I shaped my academics because I think by the time I could declare a major there was push, now's the interdisciplinary major, I think you can choose but rhetoric and communications was a big thing. But you know, UVA, still at that point hadn't really delved into getting beyond kind of traditional liberal arts. So I kind of shaped my own double major, and thought as to the why. Then I was actually contemplating doing urban planning in a school. But I got scared with another professor was like now that's Okay, thanks. So, yeah,

Agnes Redvil

I can infer that the African American Studies major was predominantly black. But, um, what was it? I don't know.

Javona Braxton

Yes, but it was I mean, I mean, it was a mix, especially because you could double up I think on psychology and sociology with as then, um, but predominantly black. Yes, I would say that.

Agnes Redvil

What about like, the professors? I took a African American Studies class in the summer before I started attending UVA and my professor was white. And I was a bit surprising to me, but...

Javona Braxton

good question. I don't like everybody was but like, in my core as classes, yeah, they were all I mean, it was. I don't recall anyone not of color. Because even my social advisor was Milton Vickerman. I mean, I feel like I just looked him up. And he was still maybe a UVA. I don't know. But he was my social advisor. He was of color. Because I think he was Caribbean. I don't recall. Anyone at my core as of course, the sociology. Yes. But as I don't remember, having any one, it wasn't a covenant. But I get how that could be daunting to think, oh, but I mean, and especially now in my career, like you see people who have shown up to learn. And that in turn, I think, especially from an academia perspective, people have, you know, taken the reins to ensure that there's a new narrative around African American in just the African diaspora how those stories are told, of course, is different coming directly from us, but it happens.

Agnes Redvil

What about the sociology field? What are the demographics like?

Unknown Speaker

Um, you know, like any other UVA classes, um, I mean, my core like a lot of my friend group, like we were all sociology majors, because that was just, you know, we weren't the techies that were in a school and, and that sort of thing. So there were like four or five of my, like black female friends, like, we were in the same sociology program, my best friend and I talked about, you know, just when you're having me, she was associate major. Um, but I mean, just thinking about, again, what a liberal arts education is purpose to do, like sociology provided you to space, you know, outside of like English, the word my thing, you know, it's a new sociology outside of, you know, your stats classes, and in all your data sets. And so actually, it is, it was fun, because it was stuff that you could connect and you could relate to. But in terms of, you know, what the program looks like, it looks like the composition of any other I think UVA major.

Agnes Redvil

What is your favorite memory at UVA, like a transformative moment for you?

Javona Braxton

So I walk it back, and I'll say graduation, because you know, as many of the traditions that you live through at UVA, um, you know, like, I got honored by secret society, which freaked the heck out of me, like, I got honored by the Z society, I think, my third or my fourth year, like, in, you know, all of the different traditions that you you kind of live through and, you know, and then things that you learn tradition wise, that really were racist later on, like, you know, the streaking it along, you're kinda like, Oh, I wish I would have known that when I was in school. But, like I said, graduation stands out, you know, you think of like, a standout moment, because it just was the culmination of everything that UVA had given and provided in my life. Um, and, you know, just the completion of an undergraduate degree where some people may have thought that you shouldn't be, because I'm sure we all got told that at some point back in the 90s, like, Oh, wait. Um, so, like I said, for me, just all of these variances built into that moment. And then everything that you think about graduation, you know, I remember the carnival music, I mean, because again, you got to wait for how many schools to proceed. And at that point, there was only one graduation ceremony. So I mean, you just kind of remember the day you remember the feeling of walking down the line, because that, you know, from the time that you sign your honor statement, you know, facing the rotunda, and then as you're exiting out to go into the world, I mean, it's just something that you never forget, because it is picture us, I mean, just being on the line. And so when you go to reunions, it's just the feeling of being all alone, like I went and visited Charlottesville about two weeks ago, my friend was last Sunday. So my cousin that I talked about, it was his birthday, they hadn't been out in COVID. And they're like, well, let's go to Charlottesville. So we're gonna go to a couple of wineries. But then we visited grounds he has two daughters. And you know, just being on the lawn always still just feels nostalgic. So tying the lawn back to experiences of, you know, just chillin hanging out on the lawn. But graduation on the lawn still is probably the most significant, you know, and paxful event that really is a combination of all the fun, all of the lessons learned all of the struggles that you experienced. So that to me would be the ultimate highlight. Because I mean, there's so many to think about over four years. So, yeah,

Agnes Redvil

Wow, I'm looking forward to experiencing it.

Javona Braxton

My goodness. Yeah, it's it's definitely an experience in itself.

Agnes Redvil

What was the most challenging thing about attending UVA?

Javona Braxton

Um, the only reason I'm positive because I never took anything as a challenge. Um, you know, I still think as a as a black woman, it was, again, maintaining and making sure that we have voice, I think was have

some I see it as a challenge. That was just my mission. It was, you know, we're here. I'm going to create impact. I'm going to demonstrate leadership, I'm going to do all the things that you know, it still stands out because back in the day, like you would do on grounds interviewing, and I'm sure it's probably done electronically now. But my first job out of college, like I had a job, but like October, right? But it was through on grounds interviewing with a consulting company. So every time you would go through another phase of interviewing process, like it would just be posted, so everybody will see it, right. And so, you know, I was always at the top of the list, I'm still progressing, then I got a job offer, right. And so having to defend how I was advancing, I mean, that's just an example of the unfortunate piece of how you often had to defend your presence, or to defend how you were able to achieve x without people looking beyond your visible identity of being a black woman, and not really understanding other things in terms of the hard work that I put in. So I had to say a challenge, it was, you know, really making space to ensure that I was seen and heard and respected.

Agnes Redvil

Are there any specific moments and can remember that like, really, like highlight those disparities between students of color and white students?

Javona Braxton

Specific, I mean, it was kind of like, the untold thing that you live through, right? Um, you know, the lottery system of basketball games, really the ugly side of a lot of things, right? I always remember, you know, my girlfriends, and I, we would, you know, especially if it's a big game, because that was before we got a little fancy new gym, right? And we literally, I mean, you will show up, people will ask this, other students would ask them, Oh, do you go here, do you? And because it was on a lottery system, like they thought they could get better seats, but I mean, it was just like you live to, through the experience of you were living through it. But then when you sit back and think about it, now, it's like, that was a lot to have to endure. But it was second nature to us, because you just knew that typically, you would have to defend yourself or to defend your while being in a certain space. Um, and like I said, when I talk about the fact that, again, you can't put that on UVA, right? Because that's just...Unfortunately, the lived experience of black people in America. And that could happen at UVA, that could have happened to me, it will in America, that could have happened to me, and you are because I have friends, a bunch of you are not going to have an any predominately white space period, that can still happen in any predominantly any predominant space, where there is someone or some group that feels that they're superior to someone else. And that, like I said, I can't support the narrative to say that that was just UVA, because that's just the world we live in, lived in, don't you think of like culture shifts, that you know what's gonna make this stop? You hope and pray that you get to that point, but that still is probably something that you've had to experience or real experiences, you haven't been on grounds.

It's just the part unfortunately, of the lived experience, you manage it differently. Um, then, you know, what we might have managed to back then. But it's something I think that came with the territory, like you knew that you had to fight to create space, like I know, on grounds now, like they're designated, like

safe spaces for students of color, which I think are great, because but then again, you know, I've read where people will students are color for like, Okay, well, they're being invaded by the majority. So how does the Safe Space actually produce what you desire in a safe space, which is somewhat again of your home base, when it's being dominated by the majority? So again, those are things that occur outside of the academical village. I mean, it's just the reality of life, that in this country, again, I don't even know even if someone who's a DNI practitioner, I can't tell you what that shift is. It's a major culture shift. But what goes into that people have experiences that they bring to the table and the ugly side of those experiences also show up in how people treat each other. And that, again, like I said, that doesn't just exist at UVA. How do you change that in the greater world so that it does impact the UVA community is how I think of it.

Agnes Redvil

Can you tell me about a woman at UVA who had inspired you? either now or during your time on ground?

Javona Braxton

Yeah, the first person that absolutely comes to mind is Dean Sylvia Terry, who was a dean at the office of African American affairs who actually led the peer advisor program. And Dean Terry was just like, Mom, you know, to us, I mean, Angela Davis, like all these different African American female leaders on grounds that just, you know, kind of took you in, it was Leslie Williams in a career center, who Leslie she's an alum as well. But then she came back and worked on grounds and Jean Gregory, who was an admission, so it's just so many different African American women on grounds who really inspired not just me, but I know the entire UVA community. And were there as core support systems for students. And so just always gave that connection in terms of knowing that there was someone who looked like you, who was also providing support and guidance and ensuring that you maintain your focus while you're on grounds. But Dean Sylvia Terry, she absolutely stands out for me, in terms of when I think of someone who, who influenced me.

Agnes Redvil

How many courses did you take that were taught by female professors? Could you talk a little bit about like, the kinds of courses that they taught the diversity that they represented?

Javona Braxton

So now you're like, gosh, I wouldn't even have a chance to think Well, actually, I know, too. That's so funny. So one would be Karen Bond, who taught a finance class and the comm school. And she was just bad ass like, she just commanded the room. You knew she knew what she was talking about. So she stands out. And then my ENWR teacher, who I think was a grad student at the time. Kim was her name and I'm old and having a foggy old lady moment right now. But, I can't remember Kim's last name, but

Kim was the reason how I was able to be a part of the work in the Women's Center. Um, and so, you know, being connected to her. But she taught ENWR um, male, female, female, female. Those are the two that stand out and I'm just thinking.

The rest of them probably male and white male. too, Heavily white male. But there was one, I didn't take her class. She was quite popular. Here got, um, if you look her up, like she introduced that thing. She taught what was being called ethnomusicology. And I know like UVA now like, has all of these different classes that study hip hop in its correlation of culture and that sort of thing. But, you know, back in the 90s, Karen, God, who I think she just finished grad school at the time, like, she taught ethnomusicology, I didn't, I don't think I could take her class just based off of my schedule, couldn't get into class. But she was well known, well loved on grounds. And because it was a cool class, and you were talking about music talking about its correlation to culture, etc. But she was a black female on rounds. But yeah, I mean, there were others because at that point, I think Rita Dove actually still taught at UVA in the English department. But um, I never was, I mean, I didn't do anything English wise outside of ENWR, once I got into sociology. Like I said, Karen Bond stood out for me in the comm school. Absolutely. Kim, which I can't remember Kim's last name, but she was my ENWR instructor. And she really provided support me getting connected to work at the Women's Center.

Agnes Redvil

I've read some of Rita's like poetry for ENWR class this semester. But I have yet to have like a black professor.

Javona Braxton

That's impact work that UVA has to still do. And a lot of that, with a lot of the racial equity work that they're doing, they're trying to, again, prioritize black professorship, which is, you know, significant, um, you know, one of my peers, he's now leaving UVA because he couldn't get tenure. So it was a denied tenure. So that's, you know, something that, you know, of course, the academic world is the lab that I don't understand, because I'm not within this space. But I think to lose a black male professor from an institution like UVA, like that's, that's a hard miss. So how do you keep maintain that narrative and assurance of ensuring that, you know, there's input of the experience that remains when you don't have the representation, you need to be able to carry out a narrative. So that's, that's hard. I'm hoping that you get one soon, because it really does impact how you're able to digest information. I mean, quite, quite frankly. So I think it just depends on you know, you can you can seek them out, you know, once you kind of know who those professors are on grounds Now, just to make sure that you have that experience. But that's unfortunate that you have to actually go seek it. Like it should be diverse enough that, you know, that's a given in terms of what your experience looks like.

Agnes Redvil

What was the presence of woman groups and like organizations on campus, like, I'm a member of the Black College Woman organization, I think it was founded like a few years ago, I do like a book club in it with other black woman was there anything like that?

Javona Braxton

I'm not specifically, you know, not anything that this speaks directly to kind of like new feminist movements and things like that, like that doesn't stand out outside of connections that I have for you the Women's Center and a program that I was in the inaugural class for the Women's Center was about building leadership with UVA students, but then we were also building self esteem within local Charlottesville females. So I was a part of that. But thinking about just, you know, General female groups at that point, nothing really stands out outside of opportunities to engage in other activities. Like there was a black female dance group, which, you know, that looks different now because they like renamed and found a new groups, which you shouldn't do when you have CIOs and kind of that, that foundational students of governance. Um, but I can't remember anything that was significant in terms of the new and I say the new because, of course, they've been feminist movements throughout history. But nothing stands out for me in the 90s, per se of anything. No, there were always responses, because the unfortunate thing was in Charlottesville, back in the 90s, there was always a serial rapist. And so there were always different groups and organizations that popped up about Sexual Assault Awareness. Sarah, I think was one it was on grounds back then. So, you know, there were different reactions, but in terms of actual advocacy and movement, I honestly do not recall outside of sororities, which also has a powerful responsibility to be able to drive the narrative of need on campus on grounds. I can't think of anything outside of like I said, things that were in response to things that happened.

Agnes Redvil

Kind of following that, was there any talk of consent or respect on campus, like, um, I guess seminars or I guess not like, online modules, I think, you know, but anything that sort of like brought like awareness or wanting to make change or anything?

Javona Braxton

Yeah, I mean, that was the role of the Women's Center, but outside of that, you know, you got that, everybody got it during your first year within orientation, your orientation period and that sort of thing. But they like I said, you know, you would always it would always come up again, when it was some type of reaction as opposed to, you know, proactive movements around, you know, female protection of the body and now sort of thing but it was always unfortunately in response to a rape in a community, some type of assault or something to that nature. But there were conversations around safety social behaviors that can impact with that experience could unfortunately be so yes, absolutely.

Agnes Redvil

What was relationship culture, like, like, the dating scene?

Javona Braxton

I'm going to tell all my friends you asked that question. Oh, it was college, right? Oh, no, we do have friends who left UVA, you know, got married during or soon after graduating. But I mean, people almost dated, but we call the you know, it was the fire hydrant relationship where it was like, you will hook up. And it might not be like full fledged relationship. Um, but I mean, people dated it was college people would not date breakup, then you move on to somebody else. Um, but everybody kind of knew who was dating, who that sort of thing. Um, you know, athletes, that sort of thing. And we add data to the athlete at one point in time, I wouldn't recommend it. You know, it's just it's the college experience. So in terms of, you know, relationship Um, I don't know if that was like when I think of my core friend group didn't do many dates because we were focused on academics, how are we going to get out. And it was a true Beyonce song It was I'm independent. I'm gonna do my thing. You want to take me out on a date? That's great. But we completely we're not pursuing Mrs. is a lot of people say like, that just wasn't the focus now at 44. Do you regret that? Oh, yeah. You go back to reunion. It was like, Oh, you kind of cute now. You are them, but I fail to get you down. So relationship wise, we had a college experience people dated people who people broke up. You laugh at it now. Like Me and my best friend we they will see somebody be like, Girl like, I'm so glad that didn't work out. Because Good Lord, look at him now, you know. So that yeah, it provides great laughter when you're in your 40s and you think about relationships that you had or didn't have in college? I'm sorry. So you see people alone that weekend and like stuff that didn't really spark spark then like it's all relative of the college experience. I think you should have the ice cream dates and you get the grounds the you know, make sure he pays, have the all those things.

Agnes Redvil

Other than zoom University, what do you think the biggest like difference is, in terms like your experience at UVA versus what goes on? Like in 2021?

Javona Braxton

I think people just have different experiences that they come to grounds with. Um, for a lot of us a lot of people that I wasn't first gen but a lot of people were first generation college educated. Think now when you look at people who are a little bit further down the line, and I'm, I'm speaking specifically for black students, like that experience is different because just people show up different in terms of what they have experienced. Um, you know, somebody recently told me that like, the whole student self governance piece looks a little bit different. Because, you know, back in our day, we were really proactive in terms of taking accountability for things that we wanted to see changed. And so a lot of that came in the movement mentality of having responses to situations, but then also trying to make sure that from a student life perspective, there were ways that we could continue to support what the aftermath looks like, right? So I think we were just a little bit more proactive in terms of advocating for

ourselves a little bit differently. Because we felt like we had to fight, we had to fight in order to be valued and respected. And maybe that looks different now. It's just I don't see. And because I am so heavily connected to UVA, I just often don't see that same fight. So I think that's probably one of the bigger differences that I would. Yeah, recall. And then I'll say this too, you know, it's sad that I really feel like UVA has a bad reputation and PR, projection, just based off of things that have happened. All grounds connected to grounds, I mean, you look at like the Rolling Stone article situation, you look at the events that happen with the, you know, white supremacy stuff that that tore through to Charlottesville community. So there's so many different negatives that have to be negated in terms of what the actual experiences is just like that gets polarized, it gets polarized on a national level, and it just creates a horrible name for UVA. And so when you speak of UVA To me, it has, in a sense, lost the prominence that it once had, it still is a prominent institution. But at the same time, there was much more prominence associated with the UVA name because we weren't just publicly disdained for certain things that have happened within a community that people just refuse to let go. And not that you should let it go. Because they did happen and it impacted the community. It just again, like I said, it just impacts how people feel towards the University of Virginia. And I think people have become much more comfortable with talking about slavery, we're talking about everything else that has happened, but in a sense, it's still cast a very dark shadow on UVA that once you live through the experience, you have a completely different viewpoint like I was having a conversation with the guy that I'm dating and he's like, you know what, I think you're shocked cuz I was like Charlottesville is my happy place. Like I'll go to Charles will go through the water, we go to grounds go to the bookstore, go to mincers eat all my food spots. Because literally when I go to Charles when I take a cooler because there's certain things that I have to experience that reminds me of Charlottesville, like, go to wayside chicken and go to my favorite shoe spot and things like that. But he was I don't think Charles will like that. He was just like, I think it was slavery, I think of tiki torches and after thing and that's, that's bad. So it's just like I think up to us as a love and people who love UVA to continue to help dispel the unfortunate reputation that UVA has been washed in just by poor social events that have happened to UVA, I was there.

Agnes Redvil

Is there something you learned at the university that you apply to your life now?

Javona Braxton

Yeah, absolutely, you know, show up and make sure that your voice is valued, heard and respected. Like that is something that I still carried. That was the reason that I went to UVA, it is the reason that I still have a strong commitment as an alum. And it's something that I carry with me as a black woman within my professional spaces. Absolutely.

Agnes Redvil

You talked about keeping connected with your friends earlier, but I wanted to ask this is like an official question. What does the UVA alumni community mean to you and how have fellow alumni affecting your life your career and your journey after graduating?

Javona Braxton

UVA family um, and that's the first thing I think of because like I said, everyone that are like within my immediate, you know, front row of life like day I met at UVA, and what I think of the support systems that I have through my UVA connections and it really is about that close knit kind of family themed respect. I mean, as an alum, you can go anywhere in this world. And I say, in this world, because I have been on vacation on an island, and had a UVA shirt on, and was a wahoo. So, I mean, I think it's just that connection of shared experience that, you know, we all attended, we graduated from university, and this is you can be black, purple, pink, or whatever. But then when you get into the black and African American community, what that means is even more significant. And so when I think of my life, post UVA post graduation, you know, for me, it continues to be a heavy part of how I identify, I am a UVA alum, I'm a proud and loud UVA alum, and will always be.

Agnes Redvil

in your opinion, what is the legacy of women at UVA?

Javona Braxton

I think the legacy of women at UVA is, you know, you shut us out, but we shut it down once we got on grounds, right? You look at the dominance, even by way of number that, you know, the gentleman's club got shut down by women, just enrollment was leadership was. And so I think that's the legacy is that we shifted the narrative of how women potentially we're seeing in the thread of what the academical village was supposed to be.

Agnes Redvil

One final question, if you could impart a piece of advice to a female student on grounds today, what would you tell her,

Javona Braxton

I would tell her to live the experience and shape that experience at UVA, to be everything that you want it to be, you can have it all, you can do it all. And that's just, you know, choosing things that bring you joy on grounds and off grounds. But making sure that you're utilizing the time in your undergrad experience to really shape the future. And so that is making sure you're prioritizing the things that matter most to you. And you think of your life, beyond graduation and making sure that you take that as the framework

for how you operate on a day to day basis, the extracurricular activities. That's how everybody, you have to be engaged in something beyond the classroom. And that's why you got into UVA. And so that's the same way that you have to continue to live the experience of UVA, by making sure that you're engaged, making sure that you're demonstrating leadership, and involve things making sure that you're remaining connected through some type of service and something greater than yourself. So I think it is just a matter of making noise. Like, that's, that's just what women need to do, you have to make sure that the legacy of women that came before you at UVA, that you uphold the standards that we set of making sure that we're impacting and creating history within the legacy of every female, you know, considering we weren't even allowed to, like 1974 or so 73, 74. So I mean, that's just the legacy that we have the responsibility to maintain excellence and how we show up on grounds and off as long.

Agnes Redvil

It's really great. Oh, before I stop recording, is there anything that you'd like to add that I may not have asked for my questions?

Javona Braxton

I think you've asked some really great questions. Um, like I said, the significance of women and especially black women on Browns is, you know, really creating the spaces that you know, maybe weren't intended for us, but really to show up and greatness in those spaces. And so, you know, for me is now an old woman. It's just my hope that everyone who has the opportunity to attend UVA really embraces that experience, and it really get the most out of UVA because there's a lot that can impact your life positively, in terms of shaping what life can be for you, postgrad.