

## Intergenerational Leadership: A Legacy of Black Excellence

By Adriana Williams

Photos courtesy of Chinyere Turner



“My goal is to not have people follow me, my goal is to assist people in finding their own path or their own journey or finding their way to their own freedom or their own happiness.”

-Capt. Chinyere Turner

Capt. Chinyere Turner is the Associate Director for the Cultural Community Centers at Kennesaw State University and a military Captain in the U.S. Army Reserve. The work that she does on campus is fueled by her passion to empower minority students and encourage them to strive for greatness. She recognizes that students from marginalized communities face unique challenges in pursuing their education, especially in predominantly white institutions. As she makes strides to improve higher education, she remains an exceptional role model and leader in the community.

Capt. Turner grew up on a military base on the small remote island of Okinawa, Japan. Her greatest memories there were immersing herself in Japanese culture and participating in athletic competitions. As a teen, she enjoyed going to Cherry Blossom Festivals and taking Taiko Drumming classes. She also reminisces about her love of arcades and amusement parks. She specifically remembers going to Sega World, an arcade amusement center in Japan. Like most teens, she lived for the Japanese arcade games, photo booths, and the huge Ferris Wheel that highlighted the entire island. Capt. Turner also remembers going to Mihama, a shopping center, which doubled as a teen hangout. She also ran track and participated in the Far East Competition with students from Korea, Guam, and Japan.

While the family was living in Okinawa, Capt. Turner’s mother served as a civilian teacher with the US Department of Defense. She recognizes her “mom” as the woman with the “rags to riches kind of story” who inspires her the most. Capt. Turner’s mother comes from a large family with roots in Columbus, GA where her grandmother raised her children and helped raise her grandchildren. She admires her mom for being able to grow beyond her humble beginnings and “still keep her character intact.” Her mom is someone who values knowledge and education, which has inspired her throughout her educational endeavors and work in higher education.

One of Capt. Turner’s mother’s saying that has stuck with her is “Use your head for more than a hat rack.” This saying was her mom’s way of encouraging her daughter to use her brain to continue to learn and become a lifelong learner. Over the years, Capt. Turner’s mother has worked as a Special Education teacher in military schools throughout the world. She is currently working as a principal at an intermediate school in England. Capt. Turner’s mom is yet another example of Black women’s excellence in leadership worthy of recognition.



When asked why are Black women leaders important? Capt. Turner said, “In a lot of ways Black women ensure that everyone else is good [and I also think that] Black women tend to bring everyone else up with us. As Black women lead, progress, and achieve, everyone else will have success. We are some of the most oppressed. When people who are the most marginalized experience equity, everyone else will as well.”

Overall Capt. Turner had an exciting childhood! Chinyere was constantly making new friends, as military families moved in and out of the base. She also had the opportunity to indulge in a culture different from her own, and she was able to meet people from across the globe. However, Capt. Turner had a major culture shock when she moved to the United States to attend Maryville University because it was the first time that she had been in a place where there were so few minorities, and where she was the only Black woman in a class. In college, Capt. Turner was a part of the Multicultural Scholars Program, which was a scholarship that focused on cultural competence, diversity, inclusion, and mentorship. She quickly assimilated into a leadership role on campus to combat the negative atmosphere that had been created for students of color. She spoke out against injustice, cultural appropriation, racism, microaggressions, and discrimination of any kind.

Capt. Turner’s work in the Multicultural Scholars Program led to her helping to reactivate the Association of Black Collegians, as there were no cultural organizations on campus. Her tireless work in this organization led to the development of other organizations including the Muslim Student Alliance and Hawaiian Asian Pacific Islander Association. She also joined the ROTC program and later enlisted in the Army. By the end of her time at Maryville University, Capt. Turner was the president of the Association of Black Collegians. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Secondary Education.

One of Chinyere’s most impactful memories was when one of her High School classmates was murdered. She remembers there being heavy silence and grief in the atmosphere following this student’s passing. Here, she was met with one of her first encounters with injustice. She remembers seeing protests and community efforts to seek justice for a young life lost. It is safe to say that this is one event, of many, that set the stage for her commitment to seeking fairness and equity.

Chinyere’s favorite quote is “To be a negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all of the time,” Black writer and Civil Rights activist James Baldwin’s response to being asked about being Black in America during a 1961 interview. Her favorite poem is “What is Your Deepest Fear” by Mary Anne Williamson from the film *Coach Carter* which says, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.”

Capt. Turner is an excellent model of exemplary character. She shares that her greatest success is not only her education but also her empathy and how she has not let society harden her. She is not only a significant role model, but a great friend as well. Capt. Turner values her relationships with others and exchanging love and support with those around her. In addition to this, she holds her chosen family and happiness in the highest regard which is in part due to the sisterly relationships she has had growing up with other Black women. Capt. Turner explains her mother's intentionality with the people that surrounded and influenced her. She enjoyed seeing all kinds of women being successful and leading with integrity. When asked how she defines success, Capt. Turner said, "What defines success for me is happiness (genuinely how happy you are) And then I would say how often you get to do what you want to do and not what you have to do."



Overall, Capt. Turner is a fun and adventurous person known for her incredible sense of humor, discipline, and intrinsic motivation. She enjoys traveling, hiking, ATV riding, and ziplining. Chinyere also speaks fondly about her role in others' villages. The popular saying "It takes a village to raise a child" hits home for her. She is proud of the role she's played in children's villages and is also proud of the village that raised her. So, what's next for Capt. Turner? She recently completed a Master's in Higher Education Administration degree and has been accepted into several doctorate programs. She hopes to continue the work she has done in the lives and hearts of her community through service and education.



#### Student Biography:

Adriana Williams is a recent graduate of Kennesaw State University. During her time at KSU Adriana obtained a Bachelor of Science in Public Health Education and completed a minor in Gender and Women's Studies. Adriana is passionate about social justice, health equity, and maternal health. She is currently pursuing a Master of Public Health degree in Epidemiology at Georgia State University. Adriana plans to use her degree to address health disparities and maternal mortality among Black women. In her spare time, she enjoys reading novels, writing, traveling, and going to concerts.

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