

Black History Month | Adrian Dukes

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[Adrian Dukes](#) can give you a canned speech about how he grew up admiring figures of historical prominence, but that wouldn't be the truth. Raised in the small, rural town of Lane, South Carolina—where “everyone knew everyone”—he otherwise pulled inspiration from those closest to him.

A student at C.E. Murray High School, he joined Upward Bound—a pre-college program that provides fundamental academic support to students. “My counselor, Nielson Hilton, always had my back and motivated me,” says Adrian. “Upward Bound allowed me to visit colleges and see that the world was bigger than just Lane, Kingstree and Greeleyville, South Carolina.”

“The local hero growing up was always Ronnie Sabb, who is a state senator right now,” Adrian recalls. “He was the guy with the big house that you always passed by while going to school.” When Senator Sabb was a practicing attorney running his own law group, Adrian began to build a lasting relationship—first through an Upward Bound work-study program, then working alongside Sabb during the summer while earning his Bachelor's degree and, ultimately, getting his first gig as an attorney from the, now, senator.

“Growing up, it was between being a doctor, a lawyer and being a major athlete—like most kids,” Adrian adds. He even explored computer information systems up until his sophomore year of college, but it was when Adrian started his first job at a law firm that his attention was captured. “I was able to go in to court and sit in the jury box while the lawyers did their work, and see the respect that everyone showed them and the prestige that they had in the community,” he explains.

Adrian studied at the University of South Carolina for both undergraduate and law school—graduating in 2013 with his Juris Doctor—and joined MGC Columbia's litigation team in 2018. He's been an asset to local and national organizations such as the South Carolina Bar Association, South Carolina Black Lawyers Association, South Carolina Defense Trial Attorneys' Association, American Bar Association, and has been on the board of the Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce and their First Steps program, South Carolina Public School Foundation as well as the Main Street Advisory Committee—which aimed to revitalize downtown Kingstree, South Carolina. Adrian has also been closely involved with his former high school's Mock Trial Team where he has served as a coach.

Within MGC, Adrian is a member of the firm's Belong @ MGC committee—among other programs and initiatives. "We're focused on trying to make sure diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is in every single facet of MGC," he adds. "One of my goals is to make sure that everyone feels represented—not just attorneys. We have to make sure that everyone is being taken care of and that no one feels marginalized." Adrian doesn't stop there though—he's always thinking about the bigger picture, including the obstacles that the legal industry has created for diverse individuals. "I think some of the issues, as far as DEI, stem from the traditional methods of recruitment that most big law firms are used to," Adrian says. "The legal industry needs to be more intentional. The normal methods don't work for diverse candidates because, historically, we don't have the same access to those types of employers." His immediate recommendation?