

## **University of Scranton**

### **Black Student Union Interview**

**Interview with:** Cheyenne Ward, Class of 2024

**Interviewer:** Koebe Diaz

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*Archives Note: Transcripts may contain spelling or formatting errors due to audio issues or automation software errors.*

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KD: Hi, thank you for agreeing to sit down and do this interview as a part of the Black Archives research I'm doing. Before we begin, I just want to let you know that this interview is not anonymous and will be recorded and put into the archives. The goal of this interview is for you to share your experiences as honestly as possible so that it can become a part of the University's Archives, and so that others can understand your experiences. This interview is not for publication purposes but some parts of this interview will be used as a part of a presentation I'll be making later this month. If you wish for your name to not be shared at that presentation, that is totally okay. We are not certain at this time who will be present at this presentation besides committee members of the Institutional History Subcommittee. Faculty, staff and students are invited to come, as well as the President of the University and other stakeholders. Would you like to continue on in this interview?

CW: Yes.

KD: And can I use your name and story as a part of the presentation?

CW: Yes.

KD: Okay. So please say your name, year, where you're from, and your cultural/ethnic background and any roles that you may hold on campus.

CW: I'm Cheyenne Ward, I am a Sophomore, I'm from [unclear], New Jersey and I am Afro-Caribbean. And any roles I may hold? I'm part of the BSU, the Nursing Association, I'm becoming a tour guide, is that...?

KD: Yeah, awesome. My first question is: can you identify a low and a high during your time here at the University in regards to you being a black student?

CW: Well, the high point would definitely be the BSU opening because that gave me more opportunity to see people who were...well, not that way, but were like me. And then the low point is being the only black girl in a class, and it just feels awkward...well, to me, and uncomfortable, most of the time.

KD: Yeah. And are you a Nursing student?

CW: Yeah, I'm the only...from what I know...I'm the only black student in the Nursing program, never mind black female in the Nursing program...

KD: Wow. So, what has...

CW: ...for at least my year.

KD: What has that been like...being the only one in your cohort...at least your cohort that you know of?

CW: I feel a little bit more pressure...a little bit because I don't see a lot of black people come into the field like the medical field sometimes, and even growing up, I didn't have that many black nurses or black doctors checking after me. So, it kind of feels like the buildup of an everyday thing, but it's still uncomfortable. But I feel like I have to prove myself a little bit more for that fact.

KD: Yeah, and what have your experiences been like in the classroom?

CW: I was like...it's the classroom. Usually when I get there, you realize you're the only one in there. But at the same time, I just get my work done. The only times it gets awkward maybe...well, I feel awkward...is when we start talking about race and then sometimes people don't have the best opinions.

KD: Yeah, and it being Nursing, what kind of conversations do you get into about race? Do you feel like they're pretty good?

CW: For race-wise, I remember we were picking topics for...usually for the Nursing program as a whole it's usually very intuitive to race because we have to make sure that we know that some races are more susceptible to other things. So, we talk about race a lot, but at the same time, we're not going into depth about racism exactly, but I will say that most of the professors do try. My professor for my lecture class, she wanted us all to go to the Racism and Justice Seminar that was happening and we all just went to go and hear that experience.

KD: Okay, and what's your relationship like with other students in your cohort, being the only black person?

CW: I was like, "that's fine." Sometimes it's like I, you know, put on a certain facade obviously.

KD: Can you say more about that?

CW: Obviously, I can't say everything that I would say to my friends back home that are of my ethnicity, and sometimes I feel like it would be too much if I acted completely like myself, so usually I guess I act in a more Caucasian-type way...a more whiter form of myself. And then when I'm with my roommate, she is white, but I'm free to be how I am personally by myself and

then when I have the BSU I...we could say all these references that they probably would never know.

KD: Yeah, and can you talk more about your experience with the BSU as a student club... what that has meant for you?

CW: As a whole, it really did mean a lot because I don't really have any black friends on campus, and it opened me up to be able to see other black kids on campus. To be honest, I didn't even think how much of us there are in the club...that there were that many of us because I barely see...I may see three of us walking down the hill or not is not usually much because we're all usually all spread out somewhere but there's not a lot of us. That really opened the door because nobody even in my building...like my freshman year...like at least my half of the building was any form of black that I could go to except for my roommate. Thankfully she found me, and I was really afraid about coming into freshman year and then rooming with somebody who didn't get my experiences at all. But, thankfully I found someone who knew my experiences. It all depends.

KD: Yeah, and I'm wondering what made you stay at the University?

CW: If we're being honest...money. Money and my Nursing program. The Nursing program is really good. So, I want to stay for that and I want to get a good degree in a prestigious Nursing program, but they give a lot of money for being black...and poor.

KD: And did you ever think about leaving?

CW: I think it was during the first semester. It was during election time, and me and my roommate were looking at Snapchats and there were certain Snapchats of people posting during the election of how if Trump wins that they're basically going to round up all black people, gay people, all those people and basically have a lynching happening. And we didn't go out for basically that whole entire week at night because we were just like we know they are Trump supporters on campus itself because we had seen the signs in some of the rooms and everything like that. So, we didn't feel the safest during that time.

KD: And where was that Snapchat? Where was that from?

CW: I don't remember. She found it on somebody's page, but it was like...one of my other friends saw one too but she's from Allentown, so she saw one for her area going around. Some person posted it on there. I don't completely remember. And then one day...that was a week I was really quiet in one of my classes so my professor asked about it, and by that time, you know, Snapchat deletes in twenty-four hours. So...

KD: Yeah...wow. And...so you came into the University in Fall of 2020?

CW: Yeah.

KD: So, that was right after...

CW: COVID?

KD: COVID, George Floyd, the BLM protests. I've been asking people how their experiences changed here, but you came right when everything was happening. So, I guess my question for you would be: what has the experience...coming straight into college, into this kind of atmosphere...what has that been like for you? Is this what you were expecting of your college experience?

CW: No. My first year...I've been saying six more years, five more years since I was in high school and middle school. So, the fact that my freshman year wasn't everything that it was supposed to be is kind of a bummer. But, you know, life goes on. I dealt through it. I was like...I will say the school will try to make an effort with the whole Black Lives Matter apology that they sent out in February about the whole auction thing that used to happen.

KD: Oh, yeah.

CW: I didn't even know that happened at this campus before that email was sent.

KD: But I will say they try to make...they do try to make an effort to be inclusive and everything, but I think it's more on the students to be inclusive because we make our safe spaces. They just give us the opportunity, I guess with the money and everything to make our safe spaces.

KD: And what's your experience of the students...I guess non-black students...how have they cultivated campus? How has that...does that question make sense? Let me restate it. What...your saying that the students kind of are the ones who should be making these safe spaces among ourselves. What has your experience been? Do you think that, apart from the BSU and maybe some other cultural clubs on campus, how would you say non-black students have been with interacting with black students?

CW: Usually, I don't get treated any differently. It's not like anything's said. It's just usually when some person's speaking...their opinions sometimes. They seem a teeny bit like a microaggression in the way they talk or a little bit of racism in the way they talk. I have been around the campus where I've heard and seen people that aren't black saying the 'n' word around campus before. So, it's a really hit-or-miss for some people. Obviously, some people are advocates for it, and I'm thankful for those people. But some people, obviously, bear in, obviously not, that type of mindset that I am. So, obviously it's going to be a clashing of thoughts and ideas.

KD: Yeah, and you mentioned hearing people yelling racial slurs. Have you ever thought of reporting anything like that or have you experienced anything...any racial discrimination or anything like that and did you think to report it?

CW: Towards me, particularly? No. It's just been I hear somebody say it, but at the same time it's a mosh-pit of people, so I won't be able to tell who it is. But I wouldn't be able to

report anyways, but thankfully something hasn't been directed towards me. Do I feel like I could say something? Yes, but I most likely will go to...what's her name? She's a Theology professor here? And she's the only...

KD: Oh, Dr. Hoskins?

CW: Yeah, Dr. Hoskins is probably the only one I would feel comfortable with going with that type of situation because she would understand it.

KD: Yeah, and would you say you feel like there's...what would you say the support is like on campus for these kinds of situations?

CW: I was like...I haven't really...from what I experienced during the freshman year with my professor, he was like "if you ever need to talk or anything else" because he knew I was quiet then when I was in class. Obviously, he knew something was wrong. But the fact that he was able to reach out to even say "you're not acting like you normally are...are you okay?". So, I feel like I can reach out to most professors. It just depends on how...my mindset, I guess, during the time, how I feel with them.

KD: And you mentioned Dr. Hoskins and that she's one of the new hires and a part of the Black Studies program. What is your...

CW: I haven't gotten to take her yet, I will be honest, but I love...I just love her.

KD: Yeah.

CW: I was...because I was going to take her Theology course and I really want to take her Theology course because on the first day she said "my class is unapologetically black" and I said "You know, I'm going to like this class so much", but my schedule was full and I had back-to-back classes and I had to drop something so I was like "Theology hopefully I can make up". So, I'm waiting, hopefully, for an open slot. She got snatched up. The thing is I knew she was a good professor, so...

KD: And what do you think is the importance or significance of hiring black faculty?

CW: To show that we're not alone. I know that it took them awhile to hire one, so to show that they're actually making an initiative, like effort. We wanted a black professor. You guys tried for months to find one for us and you made an amazing hire. We like the effort that you did put in to finding us a black professor and I like seeing someone like me in a position where it's not the easiest to go to when you're a minority. You know?

KD: Yeah, having someone that you can even go to, like you said, about experiencing something and someone that can relate to you. Do you know of anyone who has reported any incidents on campus?

CW: No, actually.

KD: No? Okay. And you said...I'm not sure if I asked this or if you said this, but if you did experience something, are you likely to report it?

CW: Most likely I would report it. Because if I didn't, I think my friend would literally kill me if I didn't report it.

KD: And you have...

CW: And it makes the campus safer for people in the future...myself and my classmates.

KD: Okay, thank you. And I talked a little bit about...we talked a little bit about support, but I'm wondering...just on the campus as a whole like including students, faculty, campus offices...what's your experience of what the support is like for black students?

CW: I was like, specifically, I know that we all get the same support things that the school gives...the counseling centers and everything like that. So, we all have opportunities to get that support, but at the same time, not everyone is going to have the same experiences as our experience here is different than everyone else's experience here. So, I guess the only support system we really have is either your family when you talk to them, a teacher that you're really close to, and specifically each other because we're first-hand experiencing it. We're going to get it the most than anybody else here. So, the best support system would be other minorities of your descent.

KD: Yeah. Thank you. And one of my last questions is: if you could give advice to an incoming black student, what would it be?

CW: Make black friends, join the Black Student Union because they're the ones that are going to know your experience if anything happens. They know how it is. They probably have dealt with it or will deal with it, and it's easier to talk to them about anything than trying to explain it to somebody who might not get it. That goes for anybody who goes to a PWI. Make sure you have at least that support system. If not, find a really, really cool person to be friends with, that literally believes that everything you believe in...at least one type of support system because it...[noise]...oh, sorry...it is going to be sometimes hard. I won't lie. It is hard sometimes, but at the end of the day, I'm here for a degree. Trying to get the degree.

KD: Is there anything else you'd like to let the Archives know? Any stories? Any last things that you want to say?

CW: I don't think so. I think I said a lot.

KD: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

CW: You're welcome.