



Marissa Layton , Clark Atlanta University- c/o 2014, Drama/Theater



Name : Marissa Layton

Your HBCU : Clark Atlanta University

Graduation Year : 2014

Major : Drama/Theater

1. Where are you from? Who introduced you to HBCUs?*

My dad was in the navy and we moved around a lot. Depending on my mood I rep Virginia, Florida, Memphis, Mississippi, Alabama, or Central America. My dad is the one who introduced me to HBCU's. He nor my mom attended one but I think my parents knew my brother and I needed to experience being emerged in black pride and black excellence.



Friday's were made for nalia :)

2. Why did you choose an HBCU over a pwi?*

I was always the "token black kid." If someone of color did something wrong I was called to the guidance office to have a talk with my peer. During honors ceremonies most of the time I was the only black kid and I knew there was no way in the world I was "as good as it got." I had to find more people like me - smart, driven, well-rounded BLACK students.

3. What is the story of your "experience" at Your HBCU given its heralded status as a stellar and prestigious institution?*

I would not trade my HBCU experience for anything! I am a proud alum of CAU but to be honest my heart had been on Spelman or Howard since I was 8. Being so close to Howard in high school made it feel like the "home school" and I wanted to experience being truly away from home so Spelman it was! I got in early and received a scholarship offer; however, it was nothing compared to what CAU offered (full ride) so of course my parents pushed me to CAU. To be frank, I was hurt at first but I instantly fell in love with CAU and the AUC as a whole. The thing I love about the AUC is each school has its own identity of course but in a way it feels like one big school. I had the opportunity to serve as a queen at Morehouse for two consecutive years and I was even selected as one of Morehouse's Woman of the Year. I loved how you had the opportunity to expand across campuses. I started a non profit that branched together all 3 schools for a big fall festival event. I was homecoming chair at CAU while having to go to coronation practice for Morehouse. It was very cool (at the time stressful lol) but that cross campus experience is one you can't get anywhere else. One of my most memorable experiences is becoming a member of The Sweet Alpha Pi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated. I can truly say I took full advantage of my college career.

4. "First time" experiences at your HBCU?*

First time I saw Miss CAU, De'Jonique Garrison, and SGA President, Katrina Hertz, I think my heart stopped for a second. Two of the most influential people on campus are black women! For me coming from predominantly white schools this was huge! I instantly begin to idolize the both of them so the day I got to call them prophytes you can imagine how proud I was! These women were my introduction to CAU greatness and pride. My first toga party - got shut down! I was so upset. Mainly because this Kappa from Morehouse stopped me on the promenade during orientation and asked me if I was going to the toga party. I said possibly when is it. This man said April - keep in mind it was August. So basically I am assuming this is the best party ever and I get excited only to get wrapped in a sheet, make way to a warehouse (without a car), and stand outside. My first pageant - amazing! I was in the Miss AKAdemic pageant (obviously, lol). I was the only freshman selected so I felt really special. My pageant sisters became my first friends at CAU and half of them became my amazing line sisters. I remember I did a monologue called "Last Laugh" about my dad dying. I will never forget someone in the front saying omg I didn't know Marissa dad was dead. It took everything in me not to laugh. For the next month, people kept walking up to me saying sorry about your dad lol. Still can't believe I didn't win best talent if that was the reaction.

5. Who are the professors that have impacted your life in and out of the classroom? How did they do that?*

Best instructor hands down - Ms. Morgan! She was my honors English teacher and she gave me my first B. She pushed me harder than any teacher ever has but I am glad she did. I owe my 4.0 in my doctoral program all to her!



Ancient throwback - Morehouse Miss Junior Promo

6. What adversities (hardships) have you overcome to become the strong person that you are?

Most of my junior and senior year of high school we were homeless. I remember being asked to speak on panels at Morehouse. My best friend from back home was in the audience and wasn't even aware of what we had gone through. It was my first time being open and it was so refreshing to receive so much love and support after sharing my story. Though I was away at college, life at home was still not that great. I remember walking down the promenade with holes in my shoes embarrassed to kick my feet up or tell anyone my true struggle. At the end of each day, I had to throw away my socks because I had been walking so much they had holes in them as well. Struggling made me the hustler/ go-getter that I am today and I love to share my experiences and knowledge with youth.

7. Are you a member of a sorority?

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated

8. Entrepreneur? Tell us about your business.

I own a consulting firm in the greater Atlanta area called Next Level. We provide business solutions to small and medium sized business specializing in the areas of strategic planning, leadership training, organizational development, and project management. In addition, I provide business coaching to current and aspiring entrepreneurs who want to grow or start their business. I also do motivational speaking and leadership workshops and seminars.

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