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I've Always Loved A Good Debate

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**‘I’VE ALWAYS LOVED
A GOOD DEBATE’**



After investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, Temidayo Aganga-Williams ’08 balances concern for democracy with hope for its future.

BY JERRY SALLEY ’90

Before August 2023, Temidayo Aganga-Williams ’08 had only been back to visit Furman once, in 2013, early in his legal career as an associate in a Wall Street firm. Since that trip, he’s added a few more lines to his résumé, including Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of New York

and, as of February 2023, partner in the New York City firm Selendy Gay Elsberg.

But it was one of his other jobs – senior investigative counsel on the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol – that led to his routinely providing

insights to CNN, MSNBC, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and other media outlets, and ultimately back to his alma mater.

“That’s what litigators do: We investigate,” Aganga-Williams told a crowded McAlister Auditorium this past fall during “StraightTalk 2023: Our Fragile Democracy,” a speaker series presented by The Riley Institute and the Osher Institute for Lifelong Learning in association with Furman’s Department of Politics and International Affairs. “We find facts – the who, what, where and when,” he said.

Aganga-Williams’ dedication to the profession began with his childhood in Atlanta, Georgia.

“In my fifth-grade yearbook, everybody had to put their future profession, and what I wanted to be was a lawyer,” he said in an interview prior to the panel discussion at Furman. “It’s something that has guided my academic life as well as how I’ve seen the world. I’ve always loved a good debate and trying to figure out what’s right and what’s wrong.”

Aganga-Williams saw Furman as “close enough to home that I could come home easily, but far enough away that I wasn’t right under my parents’ umbrella,” he said. He arrived as a first-year student ready to plunge into the conversations happening across campus in the shadow of the Iraq War.

“There was a lot of room for people to have their thoughts challenged,” he said, recalling classes with Akan Malici and Teresa Cosby, professors of politics and international affairs. “There were a lot of opportunities for me to have to defend my views. This allowed me to intellectually grow – to think about both how to craft an argument and how to defend one.”

In the early 2000s, debates occurred outside the classroom as well for Aganga-Williams, particularly during controversies over campus visits by drag troupe Kinsey Sicks and (in a later appearance) conservative commentator Ann Coulter. After earning his bachelor’s degrees in political science and philosophy at Furman, Aganga-Williams earned a law degree at Cornell Law School before starting his career in New York City.

Today, Aganga-Williams often reflects on his work investigating the attack on the U.S. Capitol and the efforts by some to keep former President Donald Trump in power despite his election loss.

The political attack began months before Jan. 6, 2021, said Aganga-Williams – but he sees evidence that “the best of America is ahead.”

“What gives me hope is that our institutions did take a beating and survived, and people ... who had the option to go an easier route, didn’t.” ♦