

We Chat with American Society of Plastic Surgery VP Dr. Steven Williams | WATCH

Rick Hazell | February 11, 2022



Dr. Steven Williams

Though the need for Black History Month is a direct slap in the face of the American education system, thus draws the ire of many in our community would rather see efforts made to permanently and irrevocably imbed these truths within the overall tapestry of accepted, mainstream history—rather than as a sidebar that is only visited one year at a time.

However, the flipside of said paradigm means that individuals who are indeed living Black history with their very existence. **Dr. Steven Williams** is one such person.

EURweb.com had the opportunity to hop on a Zoom call with Dr. Williams, board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon, as well as the current vice president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

He's Ivy League-educated, is aware of the cultural stigma that plastic and cosmetic surgery often face in the Black community, and how to educate individuals on the benefits of his practice that go beyond booties and cheekbones.

EURweb.com: What led you, as an individual of African descent, to want to become a plastic and cosmetic surgeon?



Dr. Steven Williams: It's a great question. My father was in medicine. He worked for Jet Propulsion Laboratories and the space program for years and decided to give that up mid-career. He was a big hippie and felt they were too militarily oriented and went to medical school late in life. I kind of saw that process in my earlier years, around 10 or 12. So, I was exposed to medicine early. But in college I thought that I would do something with aeronautics, maybe law. But it was really about finding the right mentors to look up. That's why I do a lot of discussions speaking about mentorship, especially in the African American community. Because we don't have enough mentors to look up to. That's why these opportunities are really valuable to me.

EURweb.com: What was the impetus for you becoming, not only a member but vice president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons?

Dr. Williams: I was trained at Yale University, where I got my medical degree and also did my plastic surgery there. One of my mentors there, a man by the name of John Pershing, also had leadership roles there at the ASPS. What he instilled in us very early is that it was not enough to simply be a plastic surgeon, get revenue and do well for yourself. It was important to give back. He'd say 'It doesn't matter how you give back, but those are the people that I want to train and that's what I want to instill in you.'

The ASPS has been a wonderful platform for me. I have been committee chair, I was vice president of aesthetic surgery, I am currently in my third year of being vice president of membership, and I have just been made aware that I will be named president-elect of the ASPS next year. One of the things that really drove me was we need African American leaders inside the ASPS.

Plastic surgery, when you think about it, it's not just cosmetic surgery. It's breast reconstruction surgery, it's congenital birth defects..."

EURweb.com: Completing your thought, I think it should be known that plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery changes lives, and not just for beauty purposes. However, within the African American community, traditionally when we think of plastic surgery, we think 'Oh, they want a "white-nose" or something like that. What do you say to the individuals who aren't aware of the positive aspect of plastic surgery and can only imagine it in a world of Kardashians and so forth?



Dr. Williams: Plastic surgery is more than just cosmetic surgery. Traditionally, African Americans are underrepresented as patients because we are not told about our options. Particularly for breast reconstruction surgery. If you look at the populations who pursue plastic surgery after breast cancer, African American patients are overwhelmingly underrepresented because either their physicians aren't telling them about it, or those options don't exist in their community. We have to take a leadership role in educating people and changing that. Cosmetic surgery is more than just the Kardashian type of thing.

Here's the other thing, I think the question about self-hate and trying to not identify with one's ethnicity is a really important one. Traditionally, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, there was a lot of that. There was one standard of beauty, one thing that we're going for, and if you're getting something done, we're going to make you in that standard.

But that's really not how most modern plastic surgeons are trained or are thinking about things. So, there's this renaissance that embraces ethnicity. I think it's important to the individual patient to understand why they're pursuing such procedures if they're cosmetic. They should see it as empowerment, not necessarily something that's coming from a self-hate place. It comes from the fact that I have the right to look the way I feel. There's nothing more powerful than that.

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