



## Student Ambassadors Represent Bluefield State at US State Department's Seventh Annual HBCU Foreign Policy Conference

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Five Bluefield State College students—Michael Bennett, Adrian Edwards, Michael Hankins, Lamont McCoy, and Vincent Rogers --and two faculty members—Eugene 'Lacy' Watson III and Dr. Colin Cavell—and one administrator—Dr. Jo-Ann Robinson, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management---took part in the seventh annual Foreign Policy Conference for HBCUs sponsored by the US State Department in Washington, DC on Friday, February 19, 2016.

The US State Department acknowledges that “Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have, for over 155 years, produced many of the nation’s leaders in business, diplomacy, government, academia, and the military and have provided generations of American men and women with hope and educational opportunity.” From the nation’s first black ambassador to Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Frederick Douglass, to notable statesman, diplomat, political scientist, and Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunch, to Bluefield State’s own long-serving career State Department diplomat and scholar Dr. William B. Robertson, many HBCU students have chosen to pursue careers with the State Department in order to serve their country, see the world, and meet and interact with folks from other cultures.

HBCUs are institutions of higher education in the United States that were established before 1964 with the intention of serving the black community, as most of the nation’s white institutions of higher education systematically excluded blacks from matriculating. Today, “there are approximately 106 HBCUs in the United States, including public and private institutions, community and four-year institutions, medical and law schools.” Most of these institutions were established in the wake of the secessionist defeat in the Civil War and the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the US Constitution. While most HBCUs exists in former slave states, there are some notable exceptions, like Bluefield State, established in 1895 in the free state of West Virginia.

The State Department’s annual HBCU Foreign Policy Conference seeks to honor the history and contributions of African Americans by bringing the next generation of leaders together with US government foreign policy officials. At Friday’s Conference, students were able to gain insight into current US policy priorities and, as well, make acquaintance with the plethora of diverse career trajectories for those wishing to work in the area of foreign policy.

Conference attendees were greeted at Friday’s opening by Karen Richardson, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs and a video address by Secretary of State John Kerry.

Director and Chief Diversity Officer John M. Robinson then spoke on the subject of “Leadership Reflections from an HBCU Legacy.” The stage in the auditorium was then set up for an interview with a Diplomat Bruce Williamson, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Resources. Moderator Jeanni Simpson, and HBCU specialist, conducted the interview. Ms. Krystal Norman, Deputy Coordinator for Cultural Affairs Training, spoke next on “Cultural Diplomacy and Promoting HBCUs Abroad.” She was followed by Kathy Johnson, Director of the

U.S. Diplomacy Center. Finishing up the first half of the Conference was Jacqueline Mourot from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs who spoke on “Opportunities with U.S. Study Abroad” programs.

After a 45 minute break, Conference attendees were mesmerized by a stimulating talk given by Linda Thomas-Greenfield, a native of Baker, Louisiana and a 1974 graduate of Louisiana State University, who is now the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Ms. Greenfield spoke of how she was first motivated to study international affairs when a group of Peace Corps volunteers came to her hometown in rural Louisiana back in the 1960s and opened up a different vision of the world for her. The Peace Corps was seeking volunteers for Somalia and Swaziland, and they spoke out against the segregated local businesses then common in Louisiana. Only 13 years of age at the time, Thomas-Greenfield, as a young African-American female, was motivated to broaden her horizons. After college, she went on to pursue her graduate work at the University of Wisconsin at Madison whereupon she was awarded a year-long fellowship to do political science research in the West African country of Liberia. Her experiences in Africa convinced Thomas-Greenfield that a diplomatic career was what she wanted to pursue, and she thus joined the US Foreign Service and steadily rose in the ranks with diplomatic postings to Jamaica, Nigeria, Gambia, Kenya, and, as US Ambassador to Liberia from 2008 to 2012, to her current position as Director of the Bureau of African Affairs. Her main message to Conference attendees was that they, too, can achieve whatever they set their sights on by being focused and persistent.

Following this keynote address, HBCU specialist Marcel Jagne-Shaw, moderated an interesting question and answer session comprised of current State Department officers who all are HBCU alumni, including Jaclyn Cole from the Office of Digital Engagement, Tyrik McKeiver from the Office of the Deputy Secretary of State, Stacy Session from the Office of East African Affairs, and Monty McGee from the Office of Economic Policy Analysis and Public Diplomacy.

Closing remarks for the Conference were made by Antony Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State who urged participants to apply for the many careers available with the US State Department (at [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov)) or with the US Agency for International Development. As well, a number of very helpful scholarship programs, including the prestigious Pickering Scholarship, the Rangel Scholarship, and the Payne Scholarship provide numerous opportunities for applicants. Mr. Blinken encouraged the over 150 students from over 20 HBCUs in attendance to seek careers in international affairs with the State Department and related agencies, for, he emphasized, America’s soft power is only as strong as the diversity of its foreign service. The world is familiar with US military might, but what really engages them, he stated, is when foreign leaders and citizens see that official government representatives of the US actually reflect the true diversity of its population.

The Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship Programs “provide academic and professional preparation for outstanding candidates to enter the U.S. Department of State Foreign Service, representing America’s interests abroad. The Pickering Fellowship Programs are open to both undergraduate and graduate students in academic programs relevant to international affairs, political and economic analysis, administration, management, and science policy. Women, members of minority groups historically underrepresented in the Foreign Service, and students with financial need are encouraged to apply.”

The Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Program is “a collaborative effort between Howard University and the U.S. State Department that seeks to attract and prepare outstanding young people for careers as diplomats in the Foreign Service of the U.S. Department of State. The program seeks individuals interested in helping to shape a freer, more secure and prosperous world through formulating, representing, and implementing U.S. foreign policy. The Program encourages the application of members of minority groups historically underrepresented in the Foreign Service and those with financial need.”

The USAID’s Donald M. Payne International Development Graduate Fellowship Program “seeks to attract outstanding young people who are interested in pursuing careers in the Foreign Service of the U.S. Agency for

International Development (USAID). If you want to work on the front lines of some of the most pressing global challenges of our times—poverty, hunger, injustice, disease, environmental degradation, climate change, conflict and violent extremism—the Foreign Service of the U.S. Agency for International Development provides an opportunity to advance U.S. foreign policy interests and reflect the American people’s compassion and support of human dignity. The Payne Fellowship, which provides up to \$90,000 in benefits over two years for graduate school, internships, and professional development activities, provides a unique pathway to the USAID Foreign Service.”

A complete list of State Department “Scholarships, Financial Aid and Student Internships” is available on the US State Department website at <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21963.htm>.

Attached photos are for BSC publicity purposes only.

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