



Bluefield State College

Bluefield State Students Attend Ninth Annual U.S. State Department HBCU Foreign Policy Conference

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Five Bluefield State College students—Dexter Simon, Thais Nogueira Nunes, Lamont McCoy, Adrian Edwards, and Michael Hankins—served as student ambassadors at the ninth annual U.S. State Department HBCU Foreign Policy Conference held at the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C. on Friday, February 16, 2018. Joining approximately 75 students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the nation, the participants listened to a variety of HBCU graduates who have gone on to successful careers in the U.S. Foreign Service. The Conference was hosted by the Office of Public Engagement of the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Public Affairs.

This year’s conference occurred in the week of the 200th anniversary of the nation’s first and most notable emissary of the U.S. State Department, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895). Escaping the horror of slavery as a young man in 1838, Douglass further liberated himself through intense self-education and discipline to become the 19th century’s premier African American voice against slavery and advocate for freedom. In 1847, he established an abolitionist newspaper *The North Star* under the motto: “Right is of no Sex – Truth is of no Color – God is the Father of us all, and we are all brethren.” Though a Christian, Douglass strongly criticized religious hypocrisy and accused slaveholders of *wickedness*, lack of morality, and failure to follow the Golden Rule. In this sense, Douglass distinguished between the “Christianity of Christ” and the “Christianity of America” and considered religious slaveholders and clergymen who defended slavery as the most brutal, sinful, and cynical of all who represented “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” Douglass split with the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison by arguing, contrary to Garrison, that the U.S. Constitution could and should be used as an instrument in the fight against slavery. In 1848, Douglass was the only African American to attend the Seneca Falls Convention in New York, the first women’s rights convention, where he spoke in favor of women’s suffrage, stating that he could not accept the right to vote as a black man if women could not also claim that right. With the onset of the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), Douglass and the abolitionists argued that since the aim of the Civil War was to end slavery, African Americans should be allowed to engage in the fight for their freedom. When President Lincoln concurred, Douglass became a recruiter for the 54 Massachusetts Infantry Regiment with three of his sons serving in the cause. The three post-Civil War amendments to the U.S. Constitution—the 13th outlawing slavery, the 14th providing citizenship and equal protection of the laws, and the 15th protecting all citizens from being discriminated against in voting because of race—while significant, were seen by Douglass as only a foundation upon which much work was yet to be done. Going on to speak forcefully for various causes including women’s rights, temperance, peace, land reform, free public education, and abolition of capital punishment, Douglass was foremost an anti-slavery activist who fought tirelessly for equality for African Americans. With his eloquence as a speaker and his erudition as a thinker, Douglass was the most well-known African American of the nineteenth century. In 1889, the newly-elected Republican President Benjamin Harrison appointed Frederick Douglass as United States Minister Resident and Consul General to the Republic of Haiti and as U.S. *Chargé d’Affaires* to the Dominican Republic, positions he served in until his resignation in 1891.

Today, the U.S. State Department maintains approximately 307 U.S. embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions in the approximately 190 extant countries of the world.

Speaking at Friday's HBCU Foreign Policy Conference, Ruth A. Davis, the 24th Director General of the United States Foreign Service and the first woman of color, the first African American Director of the Foreign Service Institute, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, a Career Ambassador, and the Chief of Staff of the Africa Bureau of the U.S. Department of State, argued that the U.S. Foreign Service "must begin to look like America", stating that, at present, "it does not." She pointed out the many opportunities, scholarships, and internships that are now being made available to young African American graduates and encouraged all to apply for these career opportunities.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have, for over 157 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 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the US Constitution. While most HBCUs exist 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.

After checking in and being provided a continental breakfast, conference attendees were greeted at Friday's opening by Public Affairs Specialist and Conference Coordinator Barbara Alston in the Loy Henderson Auditorium in the State Department's Harry S. Truman Building. Subsequent remarks by Assistant Secretary Michelle S. Giuda from the Bureau of Public Affairs were followed by a panel of State Department specialists who spoke on the subject of "Why Critical Languages Matter". Conference speakers who followed pointed out the numerous opportunities available with the State Department with new Foreign Affairs Officers, all graduates of HBCUs, speaking of their travels and work around the world. The keynote address was given by Career Ambassador Ruth A. Davis on "The Next Generation of Foreign Policy Leaders". After a catered lunch in the Delegate's Lounge, students were put into one of three groups to participate in a simulated nuclear crisis revolving around the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and national security. Reconvened after the simulation, closing remarks and group photos were taken before dismissal around 3:00 p.m.

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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