

America's Ambassadors of African Descent: A Brief History

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Abstract

This article explores the historical landscape of the 148 Black Americans (at the time of writing) who have been appointed and served as United States Ambassador to other countries, international organizations, or in an “at-large” capacity. This essay also seeks to open the discourse around Americans of African descent, and their leadership contributions to U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs, by exploring the history of the few who have held the nation’s highest diplomatic ranking and led its global and diplomatic affairs efforts as U.S. Ambassadors. Additionally, this text shows that there have been Black Americans in the highest leadership levels of U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs, and even if only a small number (148), there is a great deal of diversity across their academic and professional qualifications; areas and levels of service; and levels of influence and contributions. As such, this line of research should be a valuable source of historical records for those interested in foreign and diplomatic affairs, and those seeking to know about, showcase, and/or understand the leadership and contributions of Black American diplomatic leaders at home and abroad.

Introduction

Throughout their history of fighting for, and pursuing civil and equal rights at home, Black Americans have also made significant contributions to U.S. foreign and diplomatic relations since the middle of the 19th century. There are many historical and editorial accounts found in academic texts, popular magazines, and other print media, that demonstrate these contributions and the history and challenges faced by Black Americans in foreign and diplomatic relations. These texts rebuke common notions that Blacks had little, if any contributions to U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs, or that those contributions only began in the late 20th century. Johnson (2007) outlines an historical context for Black American contributions, to U.S. foreign policy from the period 1935-44. Krenn (1998) picks up the historical ball and offers a detailed analysis of the roles, challenges, and contributions of Black Americans in the U.S. agency responsible for execution of its foreign and diplomatic affairs – the U.S. Department of State – from 1945 – 1969¹. However, this current text - and broader research agenda - is the first to focus fully on providing an historical platform from which to view the role of Black Americans as leaders appointed by the U.S. president to guide the American agenda in countries and international institutions worldwide. In doing so, this text hopes to further the discourse and around Black American contributions to U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs, and their role as leaders in the same, by focusing on a brief history of Black American U.S. Ambassadors.

With this goal in mind, it is important at the outset to confess what this text is not about, so that it might be read in context. This is not meant to be an article on the foreign policy decisions and actions of the Ambassadors listed herein. It is not meant to analyze their individual or collective impacts on particular foreign policy issues or on U.S. relations with particular countries or regions of the world. It is not designed to analyze how successful or unsuccessful their tenures as U.S. Ambassadors were. Rather, this is an historical text designed to outline the landscape of Black Americans as U.S. Ambassadors, thus setting the stage for future analysis taking a more critical look at their individual and collective influences, impacts, and leadership characteristics.

The data collected for this article was compiled through combing archival and online records of the U.S. Department of State; broad searches for biographical information both online and in print; interviews and informal discussions with several Black American Ambassadors; discussion with individuals at the U.S. Department of State; and from review of available historical and analytical literature. With the reading and analyzing the existing pools of information, several questions about Black Americans who have served as U.S. Ambassador were answered, including: where and when did they serve; what presidents appointed whom, when, and how often; what kind of gender equality was there in ambassadorial appointments; what higher educations have they received and where; and, what were some of their accomplishments and impacts on U.S. engagement with the rest of the world? These are just a few of the questions answered in this attempt to outline the demographic and historical landscape and prompt deeper analysis on Black American leadership exemplified through their role as U.S. Ambassadors.

Black Americans, Foreign Affairs, and Diplomacy

The two professions most associated with official U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs are the Foreign Service, created by the *Rogers Act* of 1924 and the position of Secretary of State. Members of the U.S. Foreign Service, known as Foreign Service Officers or FSOs, carry out and execute the U.S. government's foreign policy and aid U.S. citizens abroad. The first Black American to join the Foreign Service was Clifton R. Wharton, Sr., one year after the *Rogers Act* was enacted. In 1973 the son of Ambassador Wharton, Sr., Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., would become the highest ranking Black American in the history of the U.S. Department of State - Deputy Secretary of State - prior to the appointment of Colin Powell as Secretary of State in 2001. No doubt many are familiar with the stories of Secretary Powell, the first Black American Secretary of State, and Dr. Condoleezza Rice, the second Black American to hold that position, as much as been written by and about these two.

The literature on Black American contributions to foreign and diplomatic affairs has largely focused on three broad yet intersecting areas. The first broad category of arguments is the role of Black Americans vis-à-vis human and civil rights at home and abroad. Central points of such literature are that the struggles for civil rights in the United States were linked to the struggles for human rights of other marginalized groups across the world. As such, Black American leaders and activists utilized those links to speak up about, and attempt to impact U.S. foreign policy and domestic policy where civil and human rights were concerned (Anderson 1996 and 2003; Janken 2003; Williams 2008). Williams (2007, 135) articulates this specifically when he argues that Black Americans' fight for domestic civil rights, was closely allied with the efforts to articulate a broader foreign policy voice for Black Americans.

Another primary area where one will find analysis of Black Americans in foreign and diplomatic affairs is concerning their roles in Africa/African affairs. Much of this literature focuses on the ancestral linkages between so-called African Americans and Africans/the African continent and how such links motivated many African American leaders to speak out and attempt to influence decolonization and liberation movements across the African continent. Their efforts, according to such literature, were marked by serious challenges, but ultimately did help lead to liberation across Africa south of the Sahara (Skinner 1992 and Williams 2007)².

Finally, a growing body of attention is being paid to the history of Blacks in the U.S. Department of State and its Foreign Service. Within such literature, some (Justesen 2006; Susser and Rasmussen 2006; Davis 2008) outlined the historical progression of Black participation in the State Department through U.S. posts abroad, while others such as Rasmussen (2006) highlight how Black Americans have overcome racism within this U.S. foreign policy agency. In doing so, this literature outlines what some of the barriers were and who the primary leaders within the State Department's ranks were, that helped to overcome these barriers and lay the foundation for increases in Black participation at the State Department, and its Foreign Service³.

Each of these schools of thought is critical to an understanding of the history and role of Black Americans in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs. However, what each seems to miss is comprehensive focus on, or debate about the top of the foreign policy leadership ladder that takes the form of the rank of U.S. Ambassador. The goal here is to begin to plug that gap. However, firstly a brief history of Black American diplomats broadly, might help to lay the foundation for this discussion on Black American Ambassadors.

It is argued that the first Black American diplomat was Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, who was appointed Minister to Haiti by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1869 (Heinl 1873). Contrastingly, scholar and former U.S. Ambassador to Botswana, Horace G. Dawson, Jr. (appointed 1978), argued that it was not Mr. Bassett who was America's first Black diplomat, but rather that honor goes to William Alexander Leidersdorff, who was appointed Vice Consul in Yerba Buena, Mexico (today's San Francisco) on October 29, 1845 (Dawson 1993). Perhaps the difference in the interpretations of "diplomat" in these two arguments stems from the sources of the appointments as Mr. Bassett was appointed by a U.S. president whereas Mr. Leidersdorff was appointed by the Tomas O. Larkin, the U.S. Consul in Monterey, Mexico. Regardless of whose argument one accepts, or what interpretation of a diplomat these instances utilize, this evidence does suggest that Black Americans' official involvement as representatives of the country in its relations with foreign nations began in the mid to late 19th century. Justesen (2004) provides further evidence of this when he presents an historical account of those who served as consuls in U.S. missions abroad as early as 1897.

No account of Black American history where U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs is concerned would be complete without reference to certain trailblazers such as Frederick Douglass, Ralph Bunch, or more recently General Collin Powell or Dr. Condoleezza Rice. Each of them could command many pages, and even volumes to discuss and analyze their contributions. However, in the interest of time and space, perhaps an example utilizing just one of them, Dr. Bunche, can serve as the representative of this elite class of Black foreign and diplomatic affairs contributors. He won the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in mediating a series of armistice agreements between four Arab states and Israel. During his career at the United Nations, Dr. Bunche also played a significant role in mediating several other international conflicts and developing international peacekeeping techniques and policies at the United Nations. Although Dr. Bunche, and the other trailblazers listed above, played significant roles in U.S. foreign and diplomatic relations, a common misconception is that he was the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. However, he was not appointed with the rank of Ambassador to lead the U.S. United Nation's Mission, a position which also traditionally carries title of the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Although he did not hold the official rank of U.S. Ambassador, he was certainly a prominent and key Black leader where U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs are concerned, and most certainly positively impacted the road that the individuals who are the subject of this text (Ambassadors) traveled to their leadership posts.

The Role of an Ambassador

There are typically two classifications for Ambassador: an Ambassador-in-Residence, responsible for a particular U.S. mission or international organization, and an Ambassador-at-Large, responsible for a particular foreign policy or related portfolio. While the latter is not assigned to a specific country, foreign government, or sovereign she/he is responsible for the execution of a foreign policy issues of key importance to the United States. According to on-line State Department Office of Historian records, supplemented by reviews of the American Foreign Service Associations (AFSA) website, there have been more than 2,115 (as of November 2014) different individual Americans who have been appointed and served as Ambassador (In-Residence) to other countries or international institutions, and 56 who have served as Ambassador-At-Large. Some have held both ranks during their careers, but in total, there have been approximately 2,171 U.S. Ambassadors overall, of which only 148 have been Black.

About the Black American Ambassador (Who, What, and Where)

Every U.S. president since Harry Truman has appointed at least one Black American as an Ambassador to a foreign nation, international organization, or foreign policy issue. These Ambassadors have come from all walks of life and included educational training from higher education ranging from small community colleges to large public research institutions; Ivy League to Historically Black Colleges and Universities; U.S.-based universities to universities abroad; as well as women's universities and military institutions of higher education. There is a large amount of diversity from this educational standpoint, as well as professionally, and personally among these Black Americans who have held the nation's highest diplomatic ranking abroad. Much of that diversity is shown throughout this text.

The first American Ambassador of African descent was Edward R. Dudley. Mr. Dudley, at the age of 38, was appointed by President Truman as Minister in Liberia, and upon elevation of that mission to full embassy status he was elevated to the rank of U.S. Ambassador to Liberia in 1949. Since that time there have been no less than, 148 Black Americans who have served as U.S. Ambassadors to over 100 countries, international organizations, and/or foreign policy issues. At least 40 have been appointed on two or more different occasions to multiple postings. Time and space do not allow for a full listing of all 148 Black American Ambassadors in this current text, but included among their ranks are 50 women and 96 men, with their ages at the time of their appointments ranging from 38 to 72 years old. Those most senior where 65 years or older at the time of a particular appointment including: George W. Haley, age 72 (The Gambia, 1998)⁴; Ruth V. Washington, age 68 (The Gambia, 1989); and Carl B. Stokes, age 67 (The Seychelles, 1994). In terms of the youngest, several were appointed at age 38 including: Edward R. Dudley (Liberia, 1949); Anne Forrester Holloway (Mali, 1963); and, J. Steven Rhodes (Zimbabwe, 1989).

Black Americans who have served as U.S. Ambassadors have hailed from virtually every region of the country as well as the islands of the Caribbean, and the African continent. For example, the first 10 were from 10 different states representing the South, the Midwest, and the Northeast. This includes: 1) Edward R. Dudley: South Boston, Virginia; 2) Jessie D. Locker: College Hill, Ohio; 3) Richard L. Jones: Albany, Georgia; 4) John H. Morrow: Hackensack, New Jersey; 5) Clifton R. Wharton, Sr.: Baltimore, Maryland; 6) Mercer Cook: Washington, DC; 7) Carl T. Rowan: Ravenscroft, Tennessee; 8) Clifton E. Knox: New Bedford, Massachusetts; 9) Hugh H. Smythe: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and 10) Franklin H. Williams: Queens, New York.

Elliott P. Skinner, one of our countries early Black American Ambassadors (Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, 1966) was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1924. Shortly after arriving in the United States in 1943, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and as a result of his military service was allowed to pursue and obtain a naturalized American citizenship (Hevesi 2007). Several others were also born in the Caribbean including: Terrence A. Todman: St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; Melvin H. Evans: St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands; Betty E. King: St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Roy L. Austin: St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and Roland B. Bullen: Grenada. Some were also born further away from their eventual country of citizenship (the U.S.A.). Specifically, two were born in Africa south of the Sahara – Daniel W. Yohannes (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013) was born in Ethiopia, while two others, Tulinabo S. Mushingi (Burkina Faso, 2013) and Patrick Gaspard (South Africa, 2014) were both born in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Presidential Appointments and Terms of Service

Keeley (2000) describes the Ambassador as the president's full-time personal representative on the ground. As such, each Ambassador must be appointed by the U.S. president (and then be confirmed by the U.S. Senate). Ambassador Cynthia Shepard Perry (Sierra Leone, 1986 and Burundi, 1989) describes the call she received from President Ronald Reagan asking her to become nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone as "elation...delight...and fulfillment" (Perry 1998, 6-9). Although not all ambassadorial nominees receive calls directly from the President asking them to serve, their service must come by way of a presidential appointment. Including Ambassador Perry's appointment, the number of times Black Americans have been appointed as U.S. Ambassadors reflects a fairly even distribution across political lines. However, Democratic Party presidents have a slight edge, having successfully appointed a Black American to the ambassadorship 107 times while Republicans have done so successfully on 98 occasions.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of presidential appointments of Black Americans (who went on to serve) since Truman. Many of these appointments include individuals who have been appointed multiple times and several were accredited to more than one country at a time. In terms of first time ambassadorial posts, Democrats appointed 77 Black Americans to their first ambassadorial appointments, while Republicans appointed 69 to her/his first such assignment.

At least 18 of the 148 Black American Ambassadors were appointed by both a Democrat and a Republican president to one of their multiple postings, demonstrating that ambassadorial appointments of individuals do not always happen only along partisan lines.

| Table 1: Appointment of Black Americans to the Ambassadorship by U.S. Presidents | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| President | Years in Office | Political Party | # of times appointed a Black American as U.S. Ambassador |
| Truman | 1945 – 53 | Democrat | 1 |
| Eisenhower | 1953 – 61 | Republican | 3 |
| Kennedy | 1961 – 63 | Democrat | 3 |
| Johnson | 1963 – 69 | Democrat | 9 |
| Nixon | 1969 – 74 | Republican | 12 |
| Ford | 1974 – 77 | Republican | 5 |
| Carter | 1977 – 81 | Democrat | 16 |
| Reagan | 1981 – 89 | Republican | 18 |
| G. H. Bush | 1989 – 93 | Republican | 16 |
| Clinton | 1993 – 2001 | Democrat | 40 |
| G. W. Bush | 2001 – 09 | Republican | 44 |
| Obama | 2009 – present | Democrat | 41 |
| TOTAL | | | 208 |

Although there have been 148 individual Black Americans who have served as Ambassadors, many have had multiple postings on varying occasions and therefore, the total number of times a Black American has been accredited by a U.S. president to an ambassadorial posting is 208. As Table 1 above illustrates, President G. W. Bush tops this list as he accredited a Black American on 44 occasions during his presidency. President Clinton is close behind as there have been 40 Black American ambassadorial appointments under his presidency. Of the 50 Black women who have served as U.S. Ambassador, President G. W. Bush appointed the largest number of them, doing so on 23 occasions during his presidency.

| Decades | Number of Appointments |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1940's | 1 |
| 1950's | 3 |
| 1960's | 15 |
| 1970's | 28 |
| 1980's | 25 |
| 1990's | 47 |
| 2000's | 55 |
| 2010 + (at time of writing) | 34 |
| TOTAL | 208 |

Terrence A. Todman holds the distinction of being the Black American who served as U.S. Ambassador on the most occasions - six. In fact, among all U.S. Ambassadors only Ambassador Thomas Pickering, who was U.S. Ambassador to seven (7) different postings – the United Nations, Russia, India, Israel, Nigeria, Jordan, and El Salvador – has been appointed more times than Ambassador Todman. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Ambassador Todman also holds the distinction of being the Black American with the largest number of different presidents appointing him as U.S. Ambassador. These include: Nixon (Chad, 1969 and Guinea, 1972), Ford (Costa Rica, 1974), Carter (Spain, 1978), and Reagan (Denmark, 1983 and Argentina, 1989). Five others were appointed by at least three different presidents across political lines:

- William Beverly Carter: Nixon (Tanzania, 1972); Ford (Liberia, 1976); and Carter (At-Large, Liaison with State and Local Governments, 1979)
- Edward Joseph Perkins: Reagan (Liberia, 1985 and South Africa, 1986); G. H. Bush U.S./U.N. New York, 1992); and Clinton (Australia, 1993)
- Johnny Young: G. H. Bush (Sierra Leone, 1989); Clinton (Togo, 1994 and Bahrain, 1997); and G. W. Bush (Slovenia, 2001)
- Arlene Render: G. H. Bush (The Gambia, 1990); Clinton (Zambia, 1996); and G. W. Bush (Cote d'Ivoire, 2001)
- Pamela E. Bridgewater: Clinton (Benin, 2000); G. W. Bush (Ghana, 2005); and Obama (Jamaica, 2010)

In terms of which year saw the most Black Americans appointed to the ambassadorship based on the number of countries/international organizations they were accredited to, 2010 tops the list with 10 such appointments, followed closely behind by four years that saw nine each – 1997 (Carter); 2002 (G. W. Bush); 2007 (G. W. Bush); 2013 (Obama) – and 1999 which saw eight (Clinton). As Table 2 above illustrates, the decade between 2000 and 2009 (the 2000's) was the 10-year period where the most Black Americans were appointed as Ambassadors and accredited to specific countries or international organizations.

Locations of Service

Black American Ambassadors have served in every region of the world and in over 100 different countries, international organizations, or overseeing specific foreign policy priorities. The U.S. Department of State classifies countries of the world into five geographic regions and international organizations: Africa (south of the Sahara); East Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Eurasia; Near East; South and Central Asia; Western Hemisphere; and U.N. and other International Organizations. For this article, the State Department's classifications have been modified to reflect nine categories as follows: Caribbean; Central and South America; East Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Eurasia; Near East/North Africa; Africa south of the Sahara; South and Central Asia; U.N. and Other International Organizations; and At-Large and Other.

These nine categories were the basis for classifying the regions, international organizations, or foreign policy priorities in which the Ambassadors discussed herein, have served. Of these nine categories, and based on the 100 plus different countries/institutions/priorities presided over, countries of Africa south of the Sahara have by far had the most Black Americans as U.S. Ambassadors as one has been accredited to a country in this region on 127 occasions. This is followed in the distance by 15 occasions in East Asia and the Pacific, 15 occasions at various posts in the United Nations or other international organizations, 14 occasions in Europe and Eurasian countries, 12 in Caribbean countries, eight (8) in countries of Central and South America, seven (7) in countries in the Near East/North Africa, and six (7) at-large or other ambassadorial appointments. With only three (3) Black Americans serving as Ambassadors, South and Central Asia is the world region that has seen the least number of Black Americans as Ambassadors. In that region Harry K. Thomas, Jr. was appointed in 2003 as U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh, Pamela Spratlen was appointed as U.S. Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan in 2011, and Marcia Bernicat appointed to Bangladesh in 2014.

Several of the Black American Ambassadors had broad range in terms of the geographic space they covered as Ambassadors. For instance, three were appointed to countries in three different regions, demonstrating the breadth and diversity of the foreign and diplomatic affairs skills and knowledge of Black American Ambassadors:

- Terrence Alphonso Todman: Europe and Eurasia (Spain, 1978 and Denmark, 1983); Central and South America (Costa Rica, 1974 and Argentina, 1989); and Africa south of the Sahara (Chad, 1969 and Guinea, 1972)
- Edward Joseph Perkins: East Asia and The Pacific (Australia, 1993); Africa south of the Sahara (Liberia, 1985 and South Africa, 1986); U.N. and Other International Organizations (U.S./U.N. New York, 1992)
- Johnny Young: Europe and Eurasia (Slovenia, 2001); Near East (Bahrain, 1997); and Africa south of the Sahara (Sierra Leone, 1989 and Togo, 1994)

Four African countries south of the Sahara have seen the most Black Americans pass through their borders as U.S. Ambassador: Liberia (8); Niger (6); The Gambia (6); Senegal (6). The non-African country with the most U.S. representation of Black Americans in the ranks of Ambassador is Trinidad and Tobago with four. Additionally, Black Americans have been appointed as Ambassador to various United Nations assignments nine (9) times including the U.S./U.N. mission in New York, the U.S./U.N. mission in Geneva, the U.S./U.N. mission in Rome, and as the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Economic and Social Council (U.N./ECOSCOS).

Discussion and Conclusions

This text is intended to provide some historical and demographic data that will open the discourse around Black American leadership in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs by focusing on the landscape of their participation via the leadership post of Ambassador. Evidence herein has shown that there have been Black Americans who have held leadership posts at U.S. missions even prior to the use of the rank of Ambassador. Whether one follows Dawson's (1993) argument that America's first Black diplomat was Leidesdorff in 1845, or Heintz's (1973) arguments that it was Basset as Minister to Haiti in 1869, it is clear that Blacks have played a leadership role as far back as the mid-19th century. One of the most well-known, early Black American diplomatic leaders was Frederick Douglass who is most known in history as a slavery abolitionist and writer. He was also appointed by President William Henry Harrison as Minister-Resident and Consul-General to Haiti in 1889. However, this present line of inquiry begins the focus of Black American leadership in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs later in U.S. history, from the time the rank of Ambassador began being utilized. This is not to diminish the leadership role of these early diplomats who held the ranks of Envoys or Ministers, but for several reasons, supports the focus on this particular rank – Ambassador – for several specific reasons. First, as indicated previously, the Ambassador as a rank, is higher in the diplomatic hierarchy than both Envoy and Minister, because the former has authority to represent both their country and their sovereign (e.g. their Head of State), which accounts for the higher ranking.

Second, the Ambassador is the person solely responsible for the well-being of all U.S. citizens and the execution of U.S. interests in their respective postings. She/he is the top U.S. official in a country or posting and oversees all other officials, citizens, and interests. She/he is also the prime negotiator on-the-ground, of U.S. interests in a particular country and often region or policy priority. Because of these reasons, the Ambassadors role as a leader in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs is engrained in the position and as such, the lack of focus on it as a lens in which to view Black American leadership in the same, is one gap that begs to be filled. This gap can be filled by opening up the discourse around Black American leadership in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs and utilizing the Ambassador as the focal point of that leadership analysis.

| Table 4: Black American 1sts Among those that were or were to become Ambassadors | |
|---|--|
| The First (with year where relevant)... | Name and Country/International Organization/Posting and year of appointment as U.S. Ambassador... |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador | Edward R. Dudley (Liberia, 1949) |
| Black American Woman Ambassador | Patricia R. Harris (Luxembourg, 1965) |
| Black female cabinet minister in the federal government (1977, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under Jimmy Carter) | Patricia R. Harris (Luxembourg, 1965) |
| Black American Ambassador appointed to a non-African country | Clifton R. Wharton, Sr. (Norway, 1961) |
| Black American appointed U.S. Ambassador on multiple occasions | Mercer Cook (Niger, 1961; Senegal, 1964; The Gambia, 1965) |
| Black American husband-wife to serve as U.S. Ambassadors | Hugh H. Smythe (Syria, 1964; Malta, 1967) and Mabel M. Smythe (Cameroon, 1977; Equatorial Guinea, 1979) |
| U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia | Aurelia E. Brazeal (Micronesia, 1990) |
| U.S. Ambassador to the African Union | Cindy L. Courville (African Union, 2006) |
| U.S. Ambassador to Guinea | John H. Morrow (Guinea, 1959) |
| Black American to lead a Marine riflemen unit into combat (1966) | Jerome Gary Cooper (Jamaica, 1994) |
| Black American to play football at Cornell University (1935 according to African American registry website) | Jerome H. Holland (Sweden, 1970) |
| Black American to sit on the Board of the U.S. Stock Exchange (1972) | Jerome H. Holland (Sweden, 1970) |
| U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland after it became independent from Britain (1966) | Charles J. Nelson (Swaziland, 1971) |
| And ONLY U.S. Ambassador to present credentials to, and serve during the Nelson Mandela Presidency in South Africa | James A. Joseph (South African, 1995) |
| Black American mayor of a major city (Cleveland, Ohio: 1967 – 1971). | Carl B. Stokes (The Seychelles, 1994) |
| Black American woman U.S. Senator (from 1993 – 1998 for the state of Illinois) | Carol Moseley Braun (New Zealand, 1999; Samoa, 2000) |
| Black American to be promoted to rank of Career Ambassador (1989) | Terrence Todman (Chad, 1969; Guinea, 1982; Costa Rica, 1974; Denmark, 1983; |

| | |
|---|--|
| | Argentina, 1989) |
| Black American Assistant Secretary of State (1977) | Barbara Watson (Malaysia, 1980) |
| Black Woman to be promoted to rank of Career Ambassador (2002) | Ruth Davis (Benin, 1992) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in the Caribbean | Theodore Britton (Barbados, 1974) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in Central and South America | Terrence Todman (Costa Rica, 1974) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in East Asia and the Pacific | Maurice Bean (Burma, 1977) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in Europe and Eurasia | Clifton R. Wharton, Sr. (Norway, 1961) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in the Near East/North Africa | Hugh Smyth (Syria, 1965) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in Africa south of the Sahara Africa | Edward R. Dudley (Liberia, 1949) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in South and Central Asia | Harry Thomas, Jr. (Bangladesh, 2003) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador in U.N. and International Organizations | Andrew Young (U.S.U.N./New York, 1977) |
| Black American U.S. Ambassador At-Large | Beverly Carter (At-Large: Liaison with State & Local Government, 1977) |
| Black American Civil Service employee of the U.S. Department of State to be appointed U.S. Ambassador | Barry Wells (Gambia, 2007) |

At the outset of this new line of research inquiry focusing on the Black American Ambassador, one platform from which to start demonstrating the importance of their roles as leaders is an illustration of their individual and collective achievements “firsts”. Table 4 reflects a very small sample of the trailblazing milestones – diplomatically, educationally, and personally – of Black Americans who have served as U.S. Ambassadors. Several conclusions can be drawn from these milestones as well as the historical and demographic data presented throughout this text. Firstly, what has been shown is that before Secretaries of State Collin Powell and Condoleezza Rice – the two Black Americans in current discourse most associate with leadership in U.S. diplomatic and foreign affairs – climbed to the top of the U.S. diplomatic establishment, there were many others that may deserve much of the credit for the successes of those two Black leaders.

Secondly, although it may not be common knowledge, Black Americans have had a more formidable role as leaders of U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs and representing America and Black America, abroad, than may be commonly thought particularly outside of the foreign affairs and diplomatic establishments. Black American Ambassadors have played significant leadership roles in high-profile and important international events. For instance, Ulric St. Clair Haynes, Jr., while U.S. Ambassador to Algeria from 1977 to 1981, was instrumental in the negotiations that ultimately led to the 1981 release of American hostages in Iran during the well-documented Iranian Hostage Crisis. Terrence Todman, while Ambassador in Costa Rica (appointed 1975) helped negotiate the treaty that ultimately resulted in Panama’s assuming ownership of the Panama Canal.

Also, while Ambassador to Spain (appointed 1978) he was instrumental in the negotiations that led to Spain's entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (*Foreign Service Journal* 2014). James Joseph was the only U.S. Ambassador to South Africa (appointed 1995) who had the honor of presenting his diplomatic credentials to President Nelson Mandela, South Africa's global human rights icon and first democratically elected leader.

Other notable points of influence were Ambassador Betty King (U.S.U.N./ECOSOC, 1997; U.S.U.N./Geneva, 2010) who, while serving as U.S. Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations or U.S.U.N./ECOSOC, was the principal U.S. negotiator on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), a global agreement to reduce poverty and human suffering through multilateral actions. In fact, during Ambassador King's tenure at the U.S.U.N./Geneva, she along with two other Black American women – Ambassador Susan Rice (U.S.U.N./New York, 2009) and Ambassador Ertharin Cousin (U.S.U.N./Rome, 2010) – were the three most powerful Americans in the U.N. system. These are all significant contributions that demonstrate leadership ability and influence that have found little space for analysis in discourse around U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs or Black history and studies.

Although analysis of the various shortcomings and strengths of this leadership of Black American Ambassadors can and should be debated in future works, such instances do provide evidence of key roles Black Americans have played in leading U.S. interests abroad. Such leadership also extends back into history during times when the U.S.A. itself was in the midst of difficult periods such as the racially charged decades of the 1950's and 60's. During that period, for instance, 18 Black Americans held Ambassadorial posts for the U.S. government. Among them was Mercer Cook who, while Ambassador to Niger (appointed 1961), Senegal (appointed 1964), and The Gambia (appointed 1965), played a pivotal role in guiding U.S. interests in newly independent African countries. Such efforts provide evidence that even as the fight for equal rights raged on in the United States our nation's Black American leadership was also working to make the world a better place as well.

The data presented in this text also provides a positive sign that the number of Black Americans whose leadership and contributions are recognized by the U.S. presidents who appoint them as Ambassadors, will continue to rise in terms of real numbers. Each new president (including Obama who has yet to do so, but is on pace to do so before the end of his term) except Kennedy and Ford has appointed more than his predecessor. The trend is also beginning to show that the posting of Black Americans to the ambassadorship is moving toward a more diverse number of countries, regions, and portfolios, although Africa south of the Sahara continues to dominate the regions in which they are serving. Recent postings in countries such as Montenegro (Sue Brown, 2011) and Kyrgyzstan (Pamela Spratlen, 2011), international organizations such as the European Union (William Kennard, 2010), Malta (Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, 2012) and key foreign policy interests like counter-terrorism (Francis Taylor, 2001), are positive signs that the depth of Black American foreign affairs interests and knowledge extend across the foreign affairs topics and regions of the world.

Of course, more in depth analysis of the landscape traversed by these 148 Black American Ambassadors, and those to come, is warranted to help shed light on who they were, how they climbed the ladders of success, and what others can learn from those climbs.

As indicated earlier, since 1893 approximately 2,171 different (as of November 2014) individual Americans have served as U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and/or Ambassador-at-Large. This supports arguments made by Williams (2007) and others that although there have been Blacks in leadership positions and in positions of influence with regards to U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs, the numbers have been “disproportionally low with respect to overall U.S. population.” Black Americans only account for 7% of all U.S. Ambassadors since 1893. Several conclusions can be drawn from this low proportion.

First and foremost, there is significant room for an increase in this percentage (and in real numbers of Black Americans) based on the total population of Black Americans in the United States. As such, efforts can continually be made to seek out Black Americans with the right skills and characteristics to lead the nation’s foreign and diplomatic affairs, whether they are career Foreign Service Officers or they have other professional expertise that qualifies them. Secondly, this small percentage of Black American Ambassadors provides factual evidence that there have been just a few distinguished individuals who have been able to pursue successful personal, academic, and professional paths that have propelled them to the pinnacle of leadership in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs. Therefore, this is indeed a small and somewhat exclusive group of leaders whose trajectories could serve as guides to others from similar backgrounds or with similar characteristics, or aspirations, to lead in their chosen fields.

It is also important to note that professionally, Black Americans have come from a diverse background of fields and gone on to represent the United States with the rank of Ambassador. Many of these individuals chose international affairs as their profession, as 82 (56%) have been in the U.S. Foreign Service (e.g. Foreign Service Officers). However, 64 (44%) of the Black American Ambassadors have come from other sectors such as business, medicine, law, academia, community organizing, and other disciplines illustrating significant diversity in their backgrounds and training. Their classification is referred to as non-career or political appointees. Individuals currently in, or with interest in, any of these disciplines may learn a great deal about where achievement in their respective fields might lead them in the future.

Although there seems to be limited public knowledge of the names and faces of the Black Americans who make up the 7% of all U.S. Ambassadors in history, there are some notable exceptions. One such exception might be Ambassador Andrew Young (United Nations, 1977) because of his work as a civil rights activist, or as mayor of Atlanta helping to bring that city the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Dandridge has called Ambassador Terrence Todman “a born diplomat and consummate professional” (Dandridge 2004, 63). Many in the diplomatic community are well aware of Ambassador Todman’s history of service and would agree with Dandridge’s assessment.

These same foreign and diplomatic affairs professionals are more than likely also aware of the history of service of other Black American Ambassadors listed or named herein, and specifically with the likes of: O. Rudolph Aggrey (Senegal and the Gambia, 1973; Romania, 1977); Edward Perkins (Liberia, 1985; South Africa, 1986; United Nations, 1992; Australia, 1993); Aurelia Brazeal (Micronesia, 1990; Kenya 1993; Ethiopia 2002); Kenton Keith (Qatar, 1992); Ronald Palmer (Togo, 1976; Malaysia, 1981; Mauritius, 1986); or Ruth Davis (Benin, 1992), because of their roles at the U.S. Department of State or related agencies. Although “mainstream” media has paid little attention to the contributions of these Black leaders, publications geared toward a Black readership have attempted to keep the public informed.

For instance, the *Afro American* has printed stories about Black American leadership in diplomacy, such as article about four Black women ambassadors (October 28, 1986) (*Afro American* 1986); or a recent article written by the current author of this text in 2014, celebrating Black American Ambassadors. *Jet* magazine, began such coverage in the 1960s, with pieces on Black ambassadorial nominations, confirmations, and swearing ins; stories of arrivals at ambassadorial postings; stories of activities while serving as ambassadors; post-ambassadorial activities; awards they have received and celebrations of their service; and obituaries announcing the passing of these important Black leaders⁵. Similarly, *Ebony* magazine has tried to cover aspects of Black American Ambassadors on occasion. For instance, it profiled the likes of Carl Rowan, U.S. Ambassador to Finland (appointed 1963); Hugh Smythe, U.S. Ambassador to Syria (appointed 1965); and, Donald McHenry, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations with rank of Ambassador (appointed 1979) in separate issues⁶.

Other vital sources of information on some these Black American Ambassadors can be found through oral history projects conducted by the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), as well as those conducted by the Phelps Stokes Fund; the latter of which are housed at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. These oral histories are excellent sources of rich data and first-hand accounts from Black American Ambassadors, and provide insights into U.S. relations with countries and institutions around the world. But, even with such rich editorial and first-hand data sources about Black American Ambassadors, what is missing are more focused scholarly studies of who these men and women were and what contributions they have made to Black history, leadership in foreign and diplomatic affairs, their respective professions, and beyond.

The professional diversity, common capacity for leadership, and varying personal characteristics of these individuals alluded to throughout this text, suggest that their stories as Black American leaders, appointed by the highest levels of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, may be valuable many. This includes those interested in foreign and diplomatic affairs, leadership studies, inspirational stories of achievement and triumph over challenges, and Black American history. Since little is known of the personal and professional journeys of many of these Black American leaders and diplomats, uncovering and illustrating more of their stories can serve as intellectual, personal, or professional motivation and stimulation for future generations.

This conclusion leads to a final discussion point of this text, from an international affairs activist perspective. That is, that the histories of these 148 Black American Ambassadors should be recognized and further studied so that their foreign policy and diplomatic views and impacts can be critically analyzed and unpacked (individually and collectively) and their successes, challenges, and even failures as Black American leaders can be debated outside of the diplomatic establishment. Given their professional diversity, common capacity for leadership, and varying personal characteristics as was partially highlighted herein, their individual and collective stories can teach a great deal to future generations and scholars and practitioners alike. An understanding of the history of Black leadership in U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs, through the lens of U.S. Ambassadors, is an important yet untapped historical line of inquiry given that no significant studies focusing on analysis of these Black Ambassadors currently exists.

In light of these conclusions, and the data presented herein, this present text will hopefully serve as both an historical account and inspirational and motivational fodder for those seeking examples of Black American achievement, triumph, and struggle while demonstrating that they did have a role in leading U.S. foreign and diplomatic affairs interests. In this regard, future generations of youth, diplomatic and foreign affairs professionals, and scholars alike, may be able to utilize the demographic and empirical data presented herein, to help guide their paths to further exploration of the lives of these leaders and potential role models from the Black American community. This is a challenge and line of inquiry that this author intends to continually pursue, adding to the body of knowledge that exists about foreign and diplomatic affairs and leadership, and their cross-sections with diversity and Black historical studies.

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Notes

¹ Brenda Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. foreign affairs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Charles P. Henry, ed. *Foreign Policy and the Black (Inter)National Interest* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

² Also see for example Roger Wilkins, "What Africa means to blacks," *Foreign Policy* No 15, Summer (1974): 130-142; Masipula Sithole, "Black Americans and U.S. foreign policy toward Africa," *African Affairs* 85, no. 340 (1986): 325-350; Tunde Adeleke, "Black Americans and Africa: A critique of the Pan-African and identity paradigms," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31, no. 3 (1998): 505-536.

³ Also see for example Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945 – 1969* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Publisher, 1998)

⁴ The general format used throughout this text is to name the Ambassador followed by her/his country and the year of appointment, i.e. George W. Hailey (The Gambia, 1998), not the full term of her/his posting.

⁵ See articles in *Jet*, May 12, 1977 and November 15, 1999 issues; October 5, 1998 and December 21, 1998 issues; June 23, 1977 and May 31, 1982 issues; August 25, 1986 and August 6, 2001 issues; August 25, 1986 and August 6, 2001 issues; January 18, 1979 and April 9, 1990 issues; and, October 26, 1967 and May 14, 1990 issues.

⁶ See articles on these topics in *Ebony* magazine in the January 1964, December 1966, and March 1980 issues.