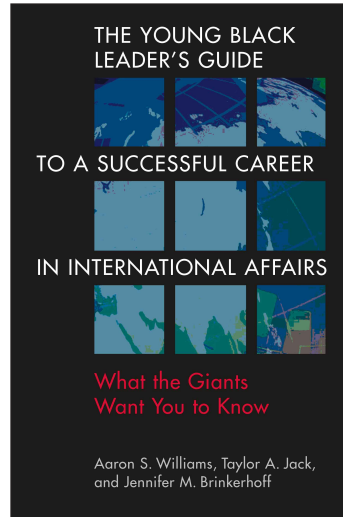


EXCERPTED FROM

The Young Black  
Leader's Guide to a  
Successful Career in  
International Affairs:  
What the Giants  
Want You to Know

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Taylor A. Jack, and  
Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff

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# 1

## Invitation to a Meaningful Career

*Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great because greatness is determined by service. . . . You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.*

—Martin Luther King Jr.,  
sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church in  
Atlanta, Georgia, February 4, 1968

We want to encourage Black Americans to pursue and succeed in careers in US foreign policy and international affairs so that these fields come closer to reflecting American society. Through a multigenerational dialogue, we knit together (1) the experience of individual “giants” who blazed a trail in US foreign policy and international affairs and (2) the needs of young Black Americans. We ask trailblazers to reflect on how they navigated challenges to reach their great achievements—what you, the next generation, want and need to know—rather than what they may naturally want to focus on.

Achievements are important but may not always provide the full story. Trailblazers might overlook forgotten challenges or prefer not to dwell on painful experiences. Or they may simply find the implications and challenges of their skin color to be so commonplace as not to be worth mentioning. Perhaps the struggles associated with their race were so unexceptional at the time they experienced them that they might not think about the need to discuss them as a particular set of challenges.

But these are precisely the experiences you may need to know about so you can gain the courage you need to pursue this professional career and understand how best to navigate your own challenges when you confront them.

### **Who We Are**

■ *I'm Aaron Williams. Throughout the book, I will "speak" to you in the slanted typeface that you are reading now. I believe the greatness of America is clearly found in the rich diversity of our citizens. This diversity will continue to be the foundation for our nation's progress in all aspects of our society and a pillar of America's role in global leadership. Black Americans are so unrepresented historically in terms of diplomacy and international affairs that we need to build a corps of leaders to present the true face of America as we interact with the rest of the globe. The more diversity you bring into the C-suite of the foreign policy halls—where the highest-ranking senior executives work—the bigger the cadre of people who have a different perspective on the world and how we should interact in it. And so, you have a better-informed dialogue and policymaking capability.*

*I was blessed to be born in an era of amazing progress in interracial understanding and societal change. This was achieved thanks to the great sacrifice, measured in blood, sweat, and tears, of the giants of the civil rights era. This led to expanded opportunities in terms of education and career opportunities for Black Americans across our nation. I was determined to pursue such opportunities and have been fortunate to have had a career that led to leadership positions in government, business, and the nonprofit world. As an integral part of my career, I sought every opportunity to assist and mentor Black professionals, to help them in achieving their career goals—to "drop the ladder down" for those coming behind me.*

*Thus, I wanted to write this book as a pathway for the next generation of Black leaders in the foreign policy arena. This book illuminates for them—for you—the rich and often unknown history and pioneering life experiences of the giants who blazed the trail of excellence in diplomacy and international affairs. They, in turn, seek to both encourage you and offer you lessons from their careers.*

► My name is Taylor Jack. Throughout the book, I will speak to you in the sans-serif typeface that you are reading now. I became a part of this project when I was completing my master's studies in international development at George Washington University. Writing a book was the furthest thing from my mind, but my curiosity and need to always "unpack" things led me to be the other voice speaking to you today. From the moment I decided to pursue a career in international service, I knew I wanted to tackle the issue of the lack of Black voices in leadership in US foreign policy and international affairs. Jennifer mentioned this

project that she was starting with Aaron Williams. Based on my professional background and interest, and because I represent the audience for this book, she invited me to sit in on a sample interview with Aaron, just to test out some questions and then reflect on what we should be asking the giants.

Meeting Aaron was kismet. His reputation precedes him. Having the opportunity to observe his sample interview changed my life in more ways than one. During those two hours, I broke every rule I learned in my research and design class. My observation lasted for all of ten minutes before I interjected and asked Aaron to elaborate on a trying time in his long and decorated career. I could see that my questioning was unexpected, but to my surprise he leaned in and answered my questions fully. Aaron framed the book as a gift to my generation, as a way to impart his wisdom and to share not only the triumphs but also the struggles that he and his colleagues and peers experienced pioneering this career. As a member of his target audience, I saw it as my duty to push for the questions that I know many students and young professionals are anxious to get the answers to.

Fortunately, my audacity paid off, and we ended up having a really good dialogue. Aaron and I discovered we have a lot of similarities. We are both from the South Side of Chicago—we grew up, albeit at different times, roughly two miles apart. We went to similar high schools. We were both Peace Corps volunteers. Our connections made it easier for us to have these conversations as he probably saw something in me, and I saw Aaron, a son of Chicago, who had reached heights that I could only dream of. After that day, I became a part of this team. I've been very honored to get the chance to hear these stories and ask the questions I think you would ask if you were in my place.

I'm Jennifer Brinkerhoff. I won't be speaking to you directly, but I want to introduce myself. I've had the honor of facilitating this project. My husband, Derick Brinkerhoff, and I had profiled Aaron in our 2005 book *Working for Change: Making a Career in International Public Service*. When Aaron retired, he approached me about writing a similar book specifically targeting Black Americans. I embraced Aaron's proposal immediately. I am from an immigrant family and am of its first generation to be college educated. When I moved to South Central Los Angeles to pursue my graduate studies, I realized just how privileged I am as a white woman who attended a great high school in a wealthy suburb. The 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest exposed me to the depth of that injustice. Until our public sector—both domestic and international—reflects our society, too many voices will be unheard, too many perspectives ignored, and too many opportunities missed to ensure this great country is a just one for all of us. When we speak to you together, we will write in the front that you are reading now, Times New Roman.

## **Why We Wrote This Book**

So why did we write this book? We want to inspire young people who already have an interest in international affairs or to spark that interest in young people who perhaps have not thought about a career in this field. We want to ensure that Black students and early- and mid-career professionals have the guidance they need to succeed. We want your talent to be represented in the United States and around the world. When Aaron first joined the diplomatic service, only a limited number of opportunities existed for Black Americans to be engaged in international affairs, such as the Peace Corps, for example, which was his ticket. But now you can join Google or work with Goldman Sachs. You can volunteer with international NGOs. You can do a wide range of things. Because of that, we need to encourage this next generation to consider public service.

► We want young people who have had no exposure to international affairs to pick up this book and say, “I see myself in this book, and I represent the very best of the United States.” I didn’t start my journey in this industry blind. I knew that I would be the only one in the room more often than not. But if I can do my part to make the journey easier for those who follow behind me, then I have served a greater purpose. We have the opportunity to occupy spaces and claim a seat at the tables that were previously denied or rationed out to the many hidden figures of US foreign policy and international affairs. This book is a symbolic passing of the torch from one generation to another, and it is up to us to make sure that there is no void of Black leadership in international affairs.

One of the things we’ve observed in working on this book and from our own experience in George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs is that the majority of Black Americans expressing interest in international affairs and participating in important fellowship programs are first and second generation. It is so inspiring to witness how many see the disparities between their heritage places and the opportunities they experience living in the US and want to make a difference. We want to also make sure multigenerational Black Americans see the importance of serving internationally, whether it’s in diplomacy, development, business, or the military. Taylor is a multigenerational Black American. At Howard University most of her classmates were first-generation immigrants. The Black American trailblazers in US foreign policy were both multigenerational and more recent immigrants. We want to ensure that all of these important voices and experiences are represented in our foreign policy.

When Aaron first approached Jennifer, he had the idea of profiling the trailblazers because they’re his people. He knows so many of them.



But a lot of profiles are already out there. People do their oral histories, and they're available on the Internet.<sup>1</sup> We knew we wanted not just to attract people into this field but to help them succeed. So we organized the book around themes, or guideposts, that will help you understand what challenges you may encounter and how to work through those challenges. ■ *We need to have role models to show people what we can do on the world stage. And to the extent that we can encourage young people to pursue these types of careers and accumulate and compile the types of experience that bring them to positions of power and influence, I think that's a worthy aim.*

This book builds on the experience of the giants who have served in the international affairs arena. It is a means to open up the world of diplomacy and international affairs to the next generation and encourage you to enter the game.

Public service is about serving others. Related careers are usually associated with government work or nonprofits. This book is about international public service specifically. When we talk about US foreign policy, we most often think about service in the federal government—the State Department, US Agency for International Development (USAID), Defense Department, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Foreign Commercial Service, and Foreign Agricultural Service, among others. US foreign policy is also executed by a range of private and nonprofit organizations: those who work under contract with the government but also those who remain independent nonprofits that nonetheless represent the values and interests of the United States abroad. The Carter Center comes to mind, for example. Whichever sector (government, nonprofit, or private) or specific organization you work in, the business of US foreign policy is about representing American values, as expressed in policies and programs, abroad. Throughout the book, we will use the term *US foreign policy* to refer to the United States' participation in international affairs broadly.

Why should you care about US foreign policy? And why now? What's so great about a career in US foreign policy? And how can this book help you on this journey? This introduction begins to answer these questions and provides a road map for the rest of the book. The book is crafted as an intergenerational dialogue—both between Aaron, a giant, and Taylor, who is at the beginning of her career, and between you and all of our giants. Throughout the book, you will hear directly from the giants—those who blazed the trail of excellence in diplomacy and international development—in their own words. The appendix contains a complete list of the Black Americans we consulted, through our direct interviews, their own writings and records, and biographies of additional

trailblazers. Like Taylor, we invite you to sit at the feet of those who went before you, some of whom are still navigating toward their giant status in this arena. Welcome to the conversation.

We'll start by addressing why this intergenerational dialogue is so important. We'll tell you about who our giants are. Then we will address the many reasons why your participation matters for US foreign policy. We then take on the tough question of why this matters now, given the many challenges and injustices we face at home in the United States, and how the quests for justice at home and abroad are not necessarily mutually exclusive pursuits. The next section presents the many factors that make a career in US foreign policy so appealing. Finally, we briefly present what we learned from our many conversations on the road to this book and introduce the chapters to follow.

## **Crossing the Generations**

■ *In the aftermath of the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis, it's clear that multi-generational, multiethnic thousands, if not millions, of people have decided that things have to change. I think young people in this country have demonstrated, over and over again, that they are fed up with the status quo. And it's not just in terms of racial injustice, but also in terms of limited economic opportunity. So they—you—are in the forefront of all of this. My role and that of my generation is to inspire you, to serve as a catalyst and to let you know that the door is open. I think you're not convinced that it is. We have to listen to you and follow your lead. I think our role is to give you space and encouragement to actually lead. We have experience. We understand how to exercise power. And we have the alliances that are needed to make change in this country. We've got to share that and help to build new alliances.*

► “You know where you have been, but you don't know where you are going.” My grandmother, who escaped a life in the Jim Crow South with a tenth-grade education, lived by this creed. This standard of humility has laid the foundation on which I walk to this day. We have to be students of history to inform the decisions ahead of us and to honor the ones made for us. “I am because you are” becomes more relevant every time any Black person ascends to new heights. Many of the names in this book are ones that most people will never know, but their contributions are timeless and are deserving of our gratitude and recognition.

Speaking truth to power is one of the many mantras that my generation lives by. There is beauty in pain and restoration in the truth. We get fired up. Aaron and the other giants in this book have been through so much, and now I want to take that on. I want to run with it. So I needed to be able to ask those tough questions

that no one has ever asked before and to say, “Look, I’m about to walk into a storm, and I have no idea how to navigate this world. Now that you’ve had four-plus decades of experience, what is something that you would tell your twenty-year-old self? Or what is something that you wanted to know back then?” So that’s what I wanted. And it’s what I want this book to give you.

This book provides that important bridge, giving you, younger generations, access to the great voices of experience, achievement, and courage—voices you might not have otherwise imagined accessing. Maybe you don’t even know these accomplished individuals exist. And we ask the tough questions, what we think you want and need to know. We didn’t just rely on Taylor to learn that. We also held focus groups with our Black graduate students and with recently awarded fellows of the Pickering, Rangel, and Payne programs.<sup>2</sup> We have doubled down on those salient issues that we first heard about from our focus groups and also from more than one of the giants we talked to.

Our intergenerational approach speaks to the needs of all of us and to the challenges of our time. As civil rights leader Ruby Sales (2020) put it, “There is a hunger that young people have, to be claimed, to be a part of an intergenerational—a trans-generational experience, to know people, because without knowing another generation, they feel incomplete, just like I feel incomplete without knowing younger people. And so we are incomplete without knowing each other.”

## **Meet Your Giants: The Many Voices in This Book**

So who are these giants? Some are undoubtedly already giants; others are giants in the making. We wanted to make sure that we captured experiences over time. This enables us to understand better those issues that are timeless, those that are particular to a stage in one’s career, and, in some cases, those that are unique to a particular time but from which we can still learn. They are all giants in their own right.

■ *Let me tell you something I truly believe. Typically, when you’re at a senior level in an organization in the United States and you meet a peer, someone who is a person of color, in any organization, you can be pretty sure, without a doubt, this person is an exceedingly good leader, a competent professional, and has achieved a lot. Because they’ve had this journey. Nobody handed it to them. Very few of us have ever inherited a situation. I have pored over the personal biographies of many, many people of color in business, government, and the nonprofit world. Everybody had to fight their way up. There was no “Hey, I want*

*you to be my protégé and I'm going to bring you along." Very rarely does it work that way.*

► What I know to be true is that a leader doesn't ascend to the heights that they have without being relentless, unapologetic, and bold: relentless in their pursuit of excellence, no matter the cost; unapologetic about who they are; and bold enough to know when to take the risks that no one else will take, to speak up, and to serve a greater purpose.

If we were to ask you who the Black American giants in US foreign policy are, would you be able to name them? Don't worry if not. Our focus group participants maxed out after just a few names. This is the point of the book. And it's not just to introduce you to the most famous, the few who come readily to mind. If you look at the history of the US foreign policy arena, you will note that despite there having been significant leaders who were people of color, they are not represented in the literature. They are almost invisible. They are invisible because, first of all, they are few in numbers and, secondly, because, with a few exceptions, they have not had the opportunity or been in the right circles to write their story. Most people, for example, would never know that Frederick Douglass had been a US diplomat. He's known for his antislavery work.

We want to introduce you to those who have never received the publicity or accolades they deserve, who work both quietly and not so quietly both behind the scenes and on stage. We want to expose you to their diversity: their many origin stories, their varied paths, and the many different ways they have worked to advance US foreign policy across the sectors (government, business, nonprofit, and military). Just knowing who they are may boost your confidence. We want you to see yourself in them. And there are many more than those who appear in this book. Time and space prevented us from including them all. We hope this book will inspire *all* of the giants to share their stories with the next generation beyond the pages of this book.

■ *In our interviews, I found confirmation of what I have seen in my career. There was a commonality there. And especially the more deprived a person's early background was, the more incredible the transformation that allowed them to be emblematic of the American dream. I certainly had no clue, growing up in the South Side of Chicago, what a foreign policy career was. I didn't even know what a Foreign Service officer was. People like you have done this, and you can also be successful.*

► I have seen a piece of myself in every person we have had the honor to interview. Much like Aaron, growing up I didn't know anyone who was in the Foreign Service or had an internationally focused career. What I did have were par-

ents who were dedicated to making sure that I had every opportunity to excel and see the world. Without their belief that I could be extraordinary, I would not have the confidence to even dream of a career in international affairs.

Some of our giants came from very humble backgrounds: from the South, like Edward J. Perkins, James Joseph, and Linda Thomas-Greenfield; from Philadelphia, like Johnny Young and Sundaa Bridgett-Jones; from New York, like Bob Burgess, Harry K. Thomas Jr., and Paul Weisenfeld; from Chicago, like Aaron Williams, Johnnie Carson, and Ertharin Cousin; and from Boston, like Alonzo Fulgham and Verone Bernard. Some benefited from early and significant exposure to the vibrant cultures afforded by historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), where their parents taught, like Aurelia E. Brazeal and Katherine Lee. Others benefited from typical middle-class upbringings. Some were raised in families with high expectations that they pursue higher education and succeed. Many are multigenerational Black Americans, and others have roots in the West Indies.

They include some of the firsts in their field. Like Aaron. ■ *Of course, in my career, because of my age and my generation, I was always the first in just about every case—in business, in government, and in the nonprofit world, because I've worked in all three sectors. I was always the first or part of the first group. At USAID, Aaron was a pioneer in public-private partnerships, the first Black person to lead the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau and to serve as mission director to South Africa (when Nelson Mandela became president). And after his career at USAID, he was the first Black person to hold the following positions: vice president of the International Youth Foundation, executive vice president of a business group at RTI International, and the first Black male director of the Peace Corps.*<sup>3</sup>

Our giants' firsts include the following:

- Ambassadorships: Australia (Edward J. Perkins), Bahrain (Johnny Young), Bangladesh (Harry K. Thomas Jr.), Brunei (Sylvia Stanfield), Federated States of Micronesia (Aurelia E. Brazeal, who was also the first US ambassador there and the first Black woman US ambassador to Kenya and Ethiopia), the Philippines (Harry K. Thomas Jr.), Slovenia (Johnny Young), South Africa (Edward J. Perkins), the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture (Ertharin Cousin), Malta (Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, who was the first Black female US ambassador there), and the first and still the only Black female career ambassador (Ruth A. Davis)

- Other essential posts in the State Department: the first Black American male (Edward J. Perkins) and female (Ruth A. Davis) directors general of the State Department; the first (and only) Black American executive

secretary of the State Department (Harry K. Thomas Jr.), the first Black American executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme (Ertharin Cousin), the first Black deputy assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs (Aurelia E. Brazeal), the first Black woman to head the Australia, New Zealand Affairs Office (Sylvia Stanfield), and the first woman to head a diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia and the first chief diversity and inclusion officer (Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley)

- At USAID: the first Black USAID director of South Asia, mission director for Afghanistan, and acting administrator (Alonzo Fulgham), the first USAID HIV/AIDS coordinator (Dr. Helene Gayle), and the first Black mission director in South America (Paul Weisenfeld)

- The first Black American assistant secretary and director general of the US and Foreign Commercial Service (Lauri Fitz-Pegado)

- The first Black president of CARE International (Helene Gayle)

- The first Black American to serve as the US Army's director of the Human Resources Policy Directorate—Pentagon (Barrye Price)

- In the international business and consulting world: the first person to lead a corporate social responsibility program at a major international corporation (James Joseph at Cummins Inc.); the first, and until he retired, the only Black senior executive in the manufacturing operations of GTE Sylvania (and its successor companies) (Bob Burgess); the first Black president of the Disneyland Resorts in Anaheim, California (Ed Grier); and the first Black senior vice president at a major international development consulting firm (Victoria Cooper)

Most of the giants are also firsts of another sort. Like Aaron, they were the first in their families to pursue international careers. Aaron was even the first in his family to leave the South Side of Chicago other than to join the military.

The interviews were an opportunity for Aaron to express to many of his friends and former colleagues, ■ *I'm just proud to know you, to be your friend, to have walked down a couple of these roads with you, and to be able to stand back in awe of you and watch you as you carried out your business.* Some of our younger giants were just as awed by Aaron, like Chris Richardson, who said, "I've got to tell you guys, I am so excited to be here with Mr. Williams. I don't think I can ever call him Aaron. . . . You're such a legend in the State Department and in global, international affairs. It's a real honor to be here with you." Thanks to helpful referrals, we all met some giants for the first time.

► It was special for me to see Aaron and the giants look back on the times they have worked together and see how they have come full circle breaking down

barriers as they go. One thing that will never escape me is that I had the chance to question, probe, and even challenge some of the greatest leaders, visionaries, and trailblazers in this industry. It was a privilege that I know not many will ever experience and a wonderful demonstration of mentorship from Aaron as well as trust. He empowered me to push the giants and unpack stories they may have never revealed. They have attributed their success to mentors and sponsors who guided them, spoke up on their behalf, and gave them tough love when they needed it the most. Aaron has walked so I could run, and I will forever be grateful.

We intentionally talked to giants from all three sectors—government, business, and nonprofit—as well as the military. Several of our giants worked across more than one sector, including Aaron, of course, and James Joseph, Dr. Helene Gayle, Dr. Jacob Gayle, and Lauri Fitz-Pegado. Some moved from government service to the nonprofit world, and even back to government, including Ambassador Ertharin Cousin, C. D. Glin, and Sundaa Bridgett-Jones. We talked to military leaders (General Barrye Price) and those who moved from the military into business (Bob Burgess) and government (Edward J. Perkins).

Some of our business giants were skeptical about why they should be included in a book about US foreign policy. As Aaron explained when recruiting former Disney executive Ed Grier, ■ *As a global executive, you are an ambassador for the United States. It just comes with the territory. As a matter of fact, what you do in a US business overseas is much more important in many ways than our diplomacy, because you have a bigger footprint, more resources, and are listened to. The official donor-funding flows that used to be the primary source of assistance to developing countries have been surpassed by direct foreign investment and trade flows. Due to this shift over decades, clearly global business leaders are now key diplomats in the world. So, I thought it was important to have this perspective.*

Our giants, especially the firsts, want to make sure there are seconds, thirds, and hundreds, with you among them.

## **Why Your Participation Matters**

As noted above, US foreign policy is about representing American values, as expressed in policies and programs, abroad. One of those fundamental values is democracy and, relatedly, upholding the US Constitution. Ours is a representative democracy, and the quality of that representation matters greatly. George Mason argued that our representatives should reflect our society as a whole. He put it this way: “To make representation real and actual . . . [r]epresentatives ought to mix with the people, think as

they think, feel as they feel, ought to be perfectly amenable to them, and thoroughly acquainted with their interest and condition” (Elliot 1836, quoted in Kenyon 1955, 32). This is well worth repeating: representatives “ought to mix with the people, think as they think, feel as they feel.”

There are so many reasons why your participation matters. We'll start with the greatest one of all: fulfilling the intention of the US Constitution. Your participation also significantly enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of US foreign policy in several specific ways.

### *Fulfilling the Intention of the US Constitution*

Quite frankly, your participation in US foreign policy fulfills the intent of the US Constitution. No one illustrates that more beautifully than Ambassador Edward J. Perkins, to whom this book is dedicated (see Box 1.1).

#### **Box 1.1 Edward J. Perkins: Living the Constitution**

“Foreign Service officers have to make sure that the Constitution is adhered to in everything we do, and also take it to the community. I spent a lot of time in Black communities when I was Director General [of the State Department]. Not because I wanted to achieve a certain point, but because I needed to have myself there, and never to forget it. I wanted them to know that there was a tool [for them] somewhere in the government. I remember being in a place called Houma, Louisiana, one afternoon. I have a cousin who was working there in the state government. And she asked me if I would meet with all of her supervisors, who were all white. And she said, ‘Well, here is my cousin. He works in Washington, and he helps to get things done. And he helps to get your things done, but you don't know about it.’

“And it was a look-see moment for these people, all white men—something that they had not ever considered before. And one of them had the nerve to ask me, ‘What do you consider to be the most important thing that you're doing?’ I said, ‘The most important thing is never to forget that I am a citizen of the United States, and the Constitution of the United States, which I'm sure all of you have read.’ And I knew they had not, right? ‘That's for me and for you too. And that's the good thing about it.’

“No one said a word. They looked at me in astonishment. And so that astonishment told me that we have a long way to go. And we aren't talking just about Black people. We're talking about other people as well. We all have got to understand, this Constitution is a living thing. You have to make it. You have to keep it living. To keep seeing it. It takes a lot of people. It takes the population to make it live.”



Black Americans have a particular experience that needs to be a part of making our Constitution a living thing. Speaking in the aftermath of the George Floyd killing, Chris Richardson, former State Department consular officer, elaborates, “People of color have both a realistic and optimistic view of the United States that other people may not necessarily have. They have the ability to tap into both the good and the bad of America, and to explain America in a way that I don’t necessarily think a white colleague would be able to, especially when you have moments like this.” Chris wants to tell you to “keep that optimism that you have, but also be willing to explain America in a realistic way, because I think what’s missing from the State Department, and from foreign affairs, is a willingness to call out America, and explain America to people who aren’t Americans in a way that’s realistic and practical.” When your experience is not represented among policymakers, our policy is debilitated. For example, the Ronald Reagan administration completely missed the tenor and potential influence of special interest groups regarding apartheid in South Africa because it was not “in tune with the minority population of the United States” (Perkins 2006, 248).

Your participation provides the example our Constitution aspires to present to the world. During Perkins’s confirmation hearing as ambassador to apartheid South Africa, he said, “Our nation is strong. That strength . . . comes from our diversity and our inherent tolerance of all people. But above all, I believe we are strong because of our respect for the dignity and worth of the individual, our encouragement of individual excellence, and our insistence that each person enjoy the right to achieve the highest of which he or she is capable. We are far yet short of perfection, but no one who knows us can doubt that we are committed to ceaseless striving for it” (Perkins 2006, 268).

### *Enhanced Foreign Policy Credibility*

As you enact our Constitution through your presence and the important posts you will hold and execute, your participation makes our foreign policy more credible. Ambassador Harriet Elam-Thomas shared, “Though I thoroughly prepared for each new assignment, I am certain the key to making a contribution toward a credible articulation of US foreign policy was the fact that I had the opportunity to serve and felt included” (Elam-Thomas 2017, 4). Your presence also may be essential to the credibility of particular foreign policy agendas. Katherine Lee, retired senior officer of the US Information Agency and US State Department, worked to promote greater equality in Brazil. She reported, “By bringing in US speakers who could show how the US Black situation had advanced, we were giving

hints to them of what they could do to progress” (Lee 2005). C. D. Glin, president and CEO of the US African Development Foundation (at the time of our interview), similarly fulfilled a role only a Black American could. He was part of the first Peace Corps group to serve in South Africa after Nelson Mandela came to power. The group was carefully assembled to showcase diversity as a strength. He used the experience as an opportunity to promote pride in the Black identity (see Box 8.4).

### *Better Understanding with Other Peoples*

Your participation enhances understanding abroad. Our giants have been very well received in their work overseas, precisely because of their Black identity. Whether its “oppressed people around the world who identify with our aspirations and our activities” (Ambassador James Joseph) or “people [who] see our struggles aligned with their struggles” (Dr. Helene Gayle), many of the giants experienced what Alonzo Fulgham shared: “I’ve always had more support and empathy from foreign policy leaders in other countries because of who I am, because I’m not one of the normal, usual suspects. I think it has always been an asset.” As Ambassador Edward Perkins reported of his meeting with Albertina Sisulu, copresident of the United Democratic Front and wife of Walter Sisulu, who was imprisoned with Nelson Mandela, she said, “Mr. Ambassador, I guess you’re wondering why I am here in view of the boycott of you by the Black leaders. It is very simple. You are a Black man. You can’t be all bad” (Perkins 2006, 310).

► What we have learned from the Black Lives Matter movement is that our world is more interconnected than ever and that this is not our fight alone. Sectors within the broader international affairs community are having a racial reckoning, forcing them to have the tough discussions about institutional racism and its roots in colonialism. This point in time has allowed us to have true and honest conversations about the roles that we have played and to dispel the narrative that international organizations are not racist. Though it took the world to be confined to their homes (during the Covid-19 pandemic) to understand the linkages between police brutality and systemic racism, we now have their attention, and I hope that the collective “we” uses it to further dismantle the structures preventing the global community from achieving true change.

### *Bringing International Understanding Home*

Your participation also enhances understandings that are brought home to the United States. Victoria Cooper put it this way: “Every voice

needs to be represented when we are outside of our shores to ensure people in those countries understand our diversity, as we work to understand theirs, and bring this broader experience back to the US. If everything is filtering only through one layer, then you're not getting a true story, you're not getting a true reflection."

■ *When you have truly representative, diverse individuals engaged abroad who bring their unique perspectives and rich experiences back home (e.g., Peace Corps volunteers, business executives, or development experts), they will enrich their domestic organizations. Their contributions routinely inform the mission and improve the results of their respective organizations and make them stronger. They see the global chessboard as multidimensional, understand the challenges and opportunities presented, and have the nuanced experience to respond effectively.*

### *Accessing High-Quality Talent*

Fundamentally, your participation is required to ensure that US foreign policy is crafted and executed by the best talent available. George Shultz, former secretary of state, said of Ambassador Edward Perkins, "The fact that he is extraordinarily capable reinforces the message that talent knows no racial boundaries" (Shultz 2006). ■ *We need to be able to tap the talent of all the people in our country. It's a mistake for us to not have access to the best and the brightest across all groups of people and to limit our ability to, together, strive for success. And it will handicap the United States in terms of its ability to compete in the world. For far too long, we have been hindered in our ability to capitalize on the vast strength of the American people because there's been this inherent limitation, stated or otherwise, legal or informal, in being able to do that.*

As US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously said, "No country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources" (Roosevelt 1934). Eighty-five years later, Susan Rice, former national security advisor, lamented, "All too often we fail to leverage our greatest strength. By choice, we are battling to defend our people and our interests in a complex world with the equivalent of one hand tied behind our back" (Rice 2019, 428).

### *Enriching Policy Creativity and Innovation*

Your talent, and the talent of our giants, does not stand alone. A crucial contribution comes from how your talents, ideas, perspectives, and experiences mix with others' and contribute to the stew that becomes innovation. Your participation expands the range of ideas and creativity.

McKinsey & Company's 2020 report *Diversity Wins* shows that highly diverse leadership teams have a higher return on investment, no matter how you measure it, in the for-profit world and the nonprofit world. Diversity brings a rich variety of experiences to look at the world and to build stronger teams.

Our giants confirm this fact in the foreign policy context. As noted above, you bring a different perspective. Dr. Helene Gayle confirms, "If our voices aren't there, our foreign policy is not going to reflect a different way of thinking that sees people differently because we do have a different lens." Susan Rice reports that the diversity deficit in our national security agencies "troubled [her] mainly because [she] found that people from similar backgrounds—for instance, white male graduates of the Ivy League—tend to approach complex issues in similar ways. They might miss nuances of language and gender, while dismissing insights that others from different backgrounds might more readily embrace" (Rice 2019, 428). Diversity is fundamentally about different ideas. As Ambassador Reuben Brigety II urges, "We have to be able to engage with each other. Not so that we can be a bunch of balkanized groups who decide how we're going to divvy up the spoils amongst our various tribes. But so that we can achieve the true promise of America, that our country is a nation based on ideas, not based on backgrounds."

Ambassador Perkins worked tirelessly to expand diversity within the State Department. And he used the efficiency argument to do so. As he relates in his autobiography, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace*, his early and successful advocacy efforts with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger rested on the argument that "bringing in more Blacks and minorities [would] help him better manage foreign policy" (Perkins 2006, 156). Later, when he was director general, Lawrence Eagleburger, then deputy secretary of state, asked for his help in ensuring the State Department remained relevant in government. Ambassador Perkins's answer? Diversity.

In these times, the salience of this diversity could not be greater. Ambassador Aurelia E. Brazeal—Rea to her friends (pronounced Ree)—provides this analysis: "I don't believe that white Americans have the coping skills to know how to be a minority. . . . You have to win an argument on its merits. You can't bring in the political argument and say, well, that trumps everything. . . . American diplomats are going to be reduced to ordinary garden type of diplomats along with every other country in the world." What makes your participation matter in this? She continues, "White Americans, in particular, will not know how to adjust to that. I think the fact that we've been a minority and we

know how to be a minority gives us inroads to other cultures that are more astute, more analytical, more on target, than our other fellow Americans who may not have that experience.”

## **Why Now?**

The evidence is clear, as outlined by Ambassadors William J. Burns and Linda Thomas-Greenfield (one of our giants): “After four years of relentless attacks by the Trump administration and decades of neglect, political paralysis, and organizational drift, US diplomacy is badly broken” (Burns and Thomas-Greenfield 2020). They call for reinventing US diplomacy for a new era. They identify the lack of diversity in the diplomatic corps as “a national security crisis.” This lack of diversity, they argue, “not only undermines the power of the United States’ example; it also suffocates the potential of the country’s diplomacy.”

■ *It’s hard, especially at this inflection point in our society, to convince people of color to think about the outside world, because we have such an amazing array of problems and challenges that we face in the United States.* Dr. Helene Gayle agrees and adds, “Because these issues are front and center. They’re right in your face. They’re things that affect you so very personally because of your own personal experience, and so it makes it harder to think about, ‘Why should I be focused on the rest of the world?’ But I think as the world is getting smaller and these issues are becoming more intertwined, there is even more of a reason for a young person of color to think about a global career.” They—and all of our giants—believe you can integrate public service and justice work in both areas, overseas and at home, by pursuing a career in foreign policy.

► We can’t stop the fight on equal and fair housing practices. We can’t stop the fight on predatory lending. We can’t stop the fight on better schools for our inner cities. This is just one of many things that we have to keep pushing. You have to find your space in the movement that fits you. This is a movement about much more than just police reform. This is about changing the culture of our society, breaking down systemic barriers everywhere. Our fight is multifaceted, layered, and does not end when we achieve justice for one of the many things that has oppressed Black people for generations. ■ *We’re focused on police brutality today, and the reform of law enforcement, because that was the match that lit the most recent flame, but a flame has been burning for a long time because of gross inequality across our society.*

Ambassador Ruth A. Davis wants you to see “the importance of not being turned off of public service by systemic racism. It’s everywhere

in this country. You've got to deal with it. So you might as well deal with it when you're making a contribution to the betterment of [hu]mankind."

## **Justice at Home and Abroad**

There are several ways you can engage in public service and justice work both at home and abroad. Justice work comes in many forms. Your particular brand may evolve over time. Ambassador Ertharin Cousin started out working domestically for legal and social justice as a lawyer in the South Side of Chicago. Emerging opportunities led her to Washington to work on a national scale, and then she was offered the opportunity to work as the White House liaison to the State Department. Her commitment to justice has not changed, but the context and particular focus have evolved with her experience and learning.

Your work for justice at home can be enhanced by your experiences working in foreign policy. All experience produces learning; you can bring lessons home. Dr. Helene Gayle says, "I'm better in what I'm doing today—which is very locally focused and really focused very much on issues of inequity in Chicago and, by extension, the United States—because of the work that I've done globally. And I think it doesn't have to be a trade-off. I think I see things differently because of having had the global experience."

You may be able to structure your assignments so you can work on domestic justice on your own time, as Ambassador Rea Brazeal did. Reflecting on her first overseas assignment from 1968 to 1971, she shared, "I would be thinking, why am I in Buenos Aires writing about the price of beef when it looks like my country's burning down?" She managed to get posted back to Washington, DC, so she could be closer to what was happening. She continued her professional work in the Foreign Service and worked on civil rights in the United States after hours.

We believe this book and its aims are important because everything we do on the global stage connects with what we do at home. We want you to walk away from this book understanding that you can have both. ► What you do on the global stage you can bring back to your community in a number of different ways. The fact that I know how to design programs and certain interventions for global communities is an asset that can't be overlooked. I want us to understand how this career leads to endless possibilities. You can touch upon your need to be an activist in your community and also have a voice in broader global communities. ■ *Yes. It should not be an either/or situation. You*

*can do both. It's a matter of which direction you go in and how you find ways to complement those dual experiences.*

In the wake of the 2020 Black Lives Matter spring and summer, as we write this, more doors may be opening for your participation in US foreign policy and beyond. Aaron has received several requests to help federal agencies or development organizations in the international affairs arena to strategize about how to address today's issues concerning diversity and inclusion. Every institution is now expected to take responsibility for opening its doors. If you look at any of the statements from all the major corporations now, they're not just talking about the boardroom and management. They're talking about recruitment across the board. They're talking about supply chains, how they present themselves, their mission statements, and what they present to the world in terms of their marketing strategies.

## **Appeal of an International Career**

Our students wanted us to ask the giants what makes them proud to be in this space. What makes them excited about being there? Ambassador Ruth A. Davis responded, "Where else could you take part in nation building? . . . Where else could you say that I was taught three or four different languages? And where else could you say that I moved and lived all around the world? And also, in all of that time, contributing to the image of the United States?"

■ *Amen to that. The chance to have a fantastic career and to see things and do things and make a difference in the world is pretty unique. The opportunity to represent the United States has always been a distinct honor for me, illustrating both the promise of America and the historical reality as a minority in our nation. I often found that my perspective was both appealing and a source of surprise and admiration for my foreign counterparts, and this was especially noteworthy during my tenure as Peace Corps director during the Barack Obama administration. As it was expressed to me in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, they believed that "I heard them" and could relate to their problems and dreams for the future; and I was perceived as a reliable partner or respected adversary.* Ambassador Davis adds, "Anybody who knows me, knows that I say that there's nothing that I would have rather done with my career." Stacy D. Williams, deputy director for the Office of the Haiti Special Coordinator at the State Department, sums it up: "There is no greater service than serving your country and seeing the world. . . . You will not find another career like

this. It's hard to get in, very easy to walk away, but the experience is overwhelming and life changing completely.”

You are likely to be motivated and inspired by more than one aspect, as we and our giants have been. Whether it's the personal experience of adventure, learning, and developing cross-national friendships; your own personal exploration and growth; the ability to enlarge your footprint and legacy; or the challenge and mission itself—careers in US foreign policy have a lot to offer you.

### *Curiosity, Seeing the World, and Living History*

Some are attracted by curiosity and the opportunity to see the world and live history. It can be as simple as curiosity, as it was for Katherine Lee: “I remember as a teenager seeing a picture of a young African American lady in *Ebony Magazine* who was a Foreign Service officer in Europe. I was so impressed that she was representing the United States abroad and imagined she must be leading a very exciting life.” Ambassador Johnny Young's first overseas experience sold him on the idea of an international career. He traveled to Beirut, Lebanon, representing the YMCA at a YMCA/YWCA conference at the American University of Beirut. He was awed by meeting people from all over the world, seeing their different ways of dressing, and trying different foods: “I just found that exhilarating. . . . It literally penetrated my soul at that point. I was determined from that point on that I was going to do something in the international arena.”

Building relationships across these cultural differences is a large appeal. Our giants have deep friendships across the world that continue well after they leave their posts or retire. When Stacy D. Williams organized retirement celebrations for his mentors, some reported they would miss the people the most. This is true for Valerie Dickson-Horton, who reported she would most miss “helping people, seeing the world, and learning how important it is to put human upliftment above politics” (USAID 2013). She added that this career “gives you a much deeper appreciation about what the world has to offer and it allows you to grow into someone with a broader understanding of the human race” (Ibid.).

Ambassador James Joseph wants you to know that “you're a part of the larger world and you need to be engaged. [Global engagement] provides the cultural experience that I think is critical to life in the world in which we now live. And it provides a relationship and an understanding of parts of the world which we have to deal with as we move into the future.” And, who knows? Perhaps you will find yourself sitting on the front lines of history as General Barrye Price describes in Box 1.2.



**Box 1.2 Barrye Price: On the Front Lines of History**

“I served in a unit called the Blackhorse, which was border Cavalry. It had the interzonal border that separated East and West Germany in the most likely invasion route through the Harz mountain coming into Fulda, Germany. It was the most remarkable experience, because that’s really where my focus came on what it means to be an American, how special a privilege it was to be a US citizen. I really learned about American citizenship through the lens of my German counterparts being on that border. I was on the border leading a patrol when freedom prevailed on November 9, 1989.

“All of these bands were lined up at the border and there was nothing that came in from higher headquarters that told us what was going on. And then they opened the gates. But it wasn’t tanks or MPs or motorized armored vehicles. It was civilian cars. There were all these blown bridges, and in subsequent days there would be an oompah band on the West side and an oompah band on the East side, where they couldn’t reach each other. One would play a song, and then the other one would reciprocate. I was like, ‘God, everything I had believed about the evil empire . . .’ They were only East German because that’s where they were when they determined the demarcation line. And it separated families. It was a perfect time to be there and to really glean a great lesson in being a great ambassador for a nation, a great lesson in citizenship and the privileges that are afforded to you as a citizen, and a great time to be an American.”

*Expressing Your Identity*

Building relationships and expressing yourself fully may be particularly meaningful for you. Sundaa Bridgett-Jones shared, “In other contexts, I can be so many groups of people around the world. I can be Latina. I can be Brazilian. So that experience that I’ve received around the world where I’m not initially judged in one way or another allowed me to gain confidence. I see people celebrating African American culture around the world. Why don’t I just go in and be myself? You don’t have to feel like you dot every *i* and cross every *t* in these situations.”

After a somewhat nomadic military upbringing, C. D. Glin shared, “Some of my siblings settled down, and, literally, once they got to a place, they wanted that sense of settling in and not moving every three or four years. And for me, it was the exact opposite—in part because I could remake myself again. I could become like a new person. I could continue to build my skill set, change personality, sort of adapt to new arenas.” ■ *Given that few people of color work in global organizations, I was*

*usually in the position of explaining America and its posture in the world, in terms of both global issues and local host-nation issues. I found that being my authentic self was always the best approach for representing the United States and the basis for forming long-lasting and worthwhile relationships.*

### *Opportunity for Impact*

Of course, a huge motivator for a career in US foreign policy is the opportunity for impact. Working in the development arena and still in the beginning stages of her career, Verone Bernard described, “I’m part of the group of individuals who have the exciting job of being able to conceptualize and try to come up with solutions to the development challenge that has been presented to us by USAID—which is a super exciting task because it really forces you to be creative, to research and identify models that have worked in other places, and to engage with stakeholders on the ground and local partners. I love what I’m able to do every day. . . . While I remain cynical about development and its effectiveness, I am still inspired by some of the work we do, and I have been able to see firsthand how the work that we do really does transform lives.”

Alonzo Fulgham, reflecting on his first experience in Haiti, still conveys that deep excitement: “You love it, or you hate it. And as you can tell by my enthusiasm, I caught the bug. Especially as a private-sector officer, because you have an opportunity to add value. . . . You start to realize what AID was trying to do in Haiti was the right thing: to build institutions, but also, while building institutions, to simultaneously create opportunities at the lower end. It was a totally integrated approach to trying to solve the problems in a country that was in desperate need of moving forward, from a development perspective. It’s where I started to romanticize about what the US government could do, if you were to apply the right resources, get the policy, and you had the right leadership.”

General Barrye Price lives by the dying words of his father: “‘Seek impact versus impression.’ What does that mean? I’m twelve years old. So my journey since then has been a life of living that purpose that he gave me. And it’s a remarkable gift. Over the years I realized that impact has more to do with legacy; and impression has more to do with experience. Impression is short-lived. It’s a fleeting event. But impact is me going back to Fort Polk, Louisiana, in 2015, where I started my career in 1985, and people remember me. It’s making a difference. It’s changing a circumstance. It’s making history in people’s lives.” Ambassador Sylvia Stanfield put it simply: “Do you want to work for value? Or do you want to work for the bottom line, the money?”

Careers in US foreign policy afford opportunities for unique impact. Ruth A. Davis, in Box 1.3, shares one of many such opportunities from when she served as ambassador to Benin (AFSA 2016).

### *Influencing Policy*

Some of the greatest impact comes from influencing policy. Ambassador Johnnie Carson shares his vision for what working in foreign policy means: “I, for one, do not believe that diplomacy is a passive activity. I believe that diplomacy is deeply activist in its definition. Diplomacy should be about advocacy, about advancing fundamental American values and principles, advancing US foreign policy goals and economic and commercial policy. And, fundamentally, it should be about advancing the interests of our country—those that are enshrined in our Constitution and its values and those that are sometimes transitory but very important. I think that one should be as active in speaking out on these issues as one can be, recognizing that we should always be in a listening

#### **Box 1.3 Ruth A. Davis: A Lasting Impact in Benin**

“My very able USAID director, Thomas Cornell, and I chose helping to restore the devastated Beninese education system as our principal aid project, with the caveat that Beninese girls, who were previously excluded, should be included in the education equation. This, of course, had a profound impact on the lives and prospects of girls and an impact on the social fabric of the country. Among many other important undertakings, we assisted in the creation of Benin’s Constitutional Court and the country’s equivalent of our Federal Communications Commission, in addition to supporting Benin’s restructuring to a free and open market economy.

“What an exciting, extraordinary time it was for me! It was like being in the United States with Mr. Washington and Mr. Jefferson, when they were building our country and defining American values. Where else, except the Foreign Service, could I have had an impact on the evolution of democracy in a developing country?

“And if that’s not enough, serving in Benin put me in touch with my ancestry. In West Africa, I visited ports from which millions of slaves were shipped to the Americas. In Ouidah, Benin, I visited the Tree of Forgetfulness, around which slaves were forced to march in a symbolic severing of ties between themselves, family, and Africa. I marched around the tree, but I did it backwards because I never want to forget.”

and understanding mode first but never in a passive mode. Diplomacy is not a passive activity.”

Victoria Cooper stresses that such policy influence can come from the business and citizen side of things too: “When I was president of the American Chamber [of Commerce] in Ghana, as well as helping to just build that chamber after Ron Brown came and encouraged us to do an American chamber in Ghana, I learned that congressional delegations listen to Americans overseas. They want to hear the American voices. So there are many ways to get involved. . . . You can come at this from different angles and add the foreign policy component to it.” There is a great variety of work you can do in US foreign policy, in the State Department and beyond, including technical work, such as environmental engineering or climate specialization, private-sector development, religious freedom, and the arts, to name a few.

Our giants want you to engage around US policy. Alonzo Fulgham believes young people “have a responsibility to ask the questions about how they want policy for the United States government to be made in the next twenty to twenty-five years. And if they want to be a part of the process, then they can’t just sit outside and scream and holler. They have to come inside, participate, and do the work.” Ambassador Sylvia Stanfield asks, “Don’t you want to make some of the decisions? Don’t you want to have a seat at the table when we negotiate the trade agreements or intellectual property?”

### *Greater Opportunities for Success*

Working overseas can also present greater opportunities to be successful than what you may find working domestically. Speaking to students at Southern University, one of Jennifer’s former colleagues from Rutgers University, Felix L. James, stated simply, “Open the box. Open the world to yourselves. If you think the space is small in the United States, think global and look at global careers.” Bob Burgess, retired senior executive at GTE Sylvania, agreed wholeheartedly: “I think that my career was made because I went overseas. I went to Trinidad and Tobago and I learned about manufacturing. And I wasn’t an accountant anymore. I was the manager. I was a leader. I was the innovator. And I loved it.”

Valerie Dickson-Horton says international experience just sets you apart: “Say you have somebody who is in engineering, but they also went out as a Peace Corps volunteer someplace. So, they have a technical skill that’s unquestionable. And then they go out and pick up some experience through Peace Corps. And you automatically get thrown into a different

category.” It doesn’t just set you apart; international experience is the key to leadership, as Dr. Jacob Gayle explains: “I think it’s important for our Black leaders to know, whatever sector they’re in today, in order for them to be in that C-suite—in that senior-most leadership—they have to take on the global world. And so whether it’s doing a two-year stint in the Bahamas, or whether it’s a year in China, or if it’s just learning a foreign language, in order to be the leader of tomorrow today, global is the answer in every sector.”

### *The Challenge and the Mission*

Many of our giants were attracted to US foreign policy because of the challenge and the mission it represents. Representing the United States overseas includes advancing national security and economic interests, as well as values, such as human rights and democracy. It includes serving American citizens abroad. And it encompasses working with other nations to address cross-national and global challenges, such as global health, environmental degradation and climate change, and terrorism and crime. It is varied, complex, and challenging. And it inspires a sense of purpose in those who take it on.

When asked about his service as a Black US ambassador in apartheid South Africa, Edward Perkins responded, “I accepted the president’s offer as an American, and as an American who believes that we should not stand as cheerleaders on the sidelines of the great issues of our time, but that we should have the courage to engage ourselves in them. I accepted this assignment as a Foreign Service officer who took an oath to go where needed, when needed” (Perkins 2006, 271–272). Ambassador Ruth A. Davis summarized her sense of purpose: “I love this country. I love it profoundly. And I always wanted to serve my country. So putting in that confidence, that love of country and not being afraid of hard work—I think that those were basically the characteristics that helped me succeed.” As an ambassador, Harry K. Thomas Jr. reported being challenged daily, and every day brought something new (Xi 2013).

### *Managing Your Expectations*

Of course, it’s important to enter this arena with a realistic perspective. Katherine Lee (2005) shared that as a career counselor of new officers, she could usually tell who would last beyond one or two years in the Foreign Service. It was all based on their reasons for joining. If it was only love of travel, they might become disillusioned by the bureaucracy.

They might join hoping to serve their heritage country, but you cannot spend an entire career in one place. It's important to join the US diplomatic service because you believe in the mission described above. That sense of purpose will enable you to be flexible and provide greater opportunities for achieving a meaningful life and career. In recruiting for the Foreign Service, Ambassador Ruth A. Davis reported, "I do not sugarcoat the many challenges of a career in the Foreign Service, but tell them honestly that it offers a unique opportunity for public service that makes a difference in issues with global impact" (AFSA 2016). Despite the challenges, as the great Elijah Cummings said, "So many people come to government knowing that they're not going to make the kind of money that they would make in the private sector. But they come to government to feed their souls, to help other people, to lift them up, to make their lives better. And that's you and you and you and you" (quoted in Davidson 2019).

## **What Have We Learned and What's Next for You?**

Collectively, our giants cover decades of much progress, setbacks, and continuous struggle. ■ *I told Ambassador Ruth A. Davis, "It struck me the challenges you took on, because you saw this whole thing evolve from the 1960s and the height of the civil rights movement to where we are today. Of course, you've faced many of the same challenges once again because these battles are, as you know, generational. You win a battle of one generation, new leadership comes in, a new generation, you've got to fight the battle all over again." From all the interviews with people I mostly have known for many years, what struck me was how much commonality there was between their journeys to the top, what they had to deal with, and how they addressed it. The commonality of the Black experience. And the fact that most of us use the same skill set to maneuver in these treacherous waters and still stay afloat, persevere, be successful, and also come out at the other end not bitter but very positive and forward-looking.*

► While everybody's had different experiences, their pursuit of justice, their pursuit of excellence, and the service that they've led with their entire lives are all the same. And they've all had some level of risk. And they gambled a little bit with pushing back on authority, saying, "No, we need to do this." Everything that they have been through and sacrificed allowed me to get to this moment.

The people we interviewed not only stayed true to themselves but amplified who they are, as they navigated these spaces. And they used that to their advantage in the way that they built relationships and per-

suaded people, especially some of the women whom we interviewed. Most impressive was their resilience: their ability to withstand the assaults and not just do their job but excel and become role models and leaders for all of us.

How do we begin to tell their stories in ways that will help you succeed? We start with where the giants' journeys began. General Price emphasized how important that is for really reaching you, our readers. As he put it, "It's very important to start with the guy who left Gary, Indiana, in 1980. Because that's the guy that they can identify with best. If they don't go through the progressive and sequential journey of my life, they can't see necessarily becoming that somebody." We cover our giants' first exposure to international affairs, the birth of their careers, the things they've accomplished on behalf of the United States, and the exquisite role models they have been and continue to be.

Their many stories and advice are organized around guideposts to help you succeed. Chapters 2 and 3 address starting out and building confidence. We review the potential sparks that can light up your interest in this career path and explore how to get there—including a discussion of the comparative advantages of attending an HBCU, various internship and fellowship opportunities, and family support. Chapter 3 looks at what happens when you arrive. What is it like to be the only? What is imposter syndrome, and how can you manage it? Our giants provide advice for gaining confidence. Chapter 4 is about how to benefit from others: networks, role models, mentors, and sponsors. Who can help you as they helped our giants? How can you find, or recognize, and accept them? What is the difference between mentoring and sponsorship? And what are your responsibilities in a mentoring relationship? In Chapter 5, we draw from our giants' advice and experience to describe how you can navigate your foreign policy career: the importance of having a vision and how to hold the reins of your career, create and seize opportunities, and make strategic choices—including taking on what may look like undesirable jobs. We will also address when race is a factor in navigating your career and how to manage performance-review processes.

In Chapter 6, our giants describe specific experiences, cautionary tales, and demonstrated skills for knowing when to fight discrimination, jerks, and other injustices and how to endure and sometimes triumph in the face of these and other challenges. In Chapter 7, we emphasize that you are not alone. Facing these challenges and life stresses requires intentional effort to construct a balanced life with support from others and beyond your job. We pushed the giants to address

that tired old stigma against talking about mental health to share with you their coping mechanisms. They stress the importance of seeking support when you need it, connecting with your peers, building support networks, and nurturing your life outside work. In Chapter 8 we address how to do all of the above and also be all of who you are: how to understand and capitalize on the advantages of your identity, how to balance your professional and personal identities, and how to be your authentic self.

Chapter 9 addresses the triumphs and challenges of leadership. In sharing their own stories and experiences, the giants illustrate the components of skillful leadership: being responsible, building your team, innovating, and creating a followership. They provide guidance on how to sustain the right attitude to be successful, to weather inevitable setbacks, and to be resilient. Chapter 10 is the giants' and our final gift to you. We summarize the elements of success gleaned from these many experiences. The giants then provide their charge to you—what they expect from you as you pursue and excel in following their path of meaningful careers in international public service. We conclude with a symbolic passing of the torch to you and your generation. Aaron will present his final charge to you, and Taylor will have the last word, responding to that charge and making one herself to you, her peers.

The giants are inspiring, no doubt. But, as Taylor intended, some of this is tough stuff. We are so grateful to the giants for their willingness to share their strengths and vulnerabilities. Every one of our giants shares a commitment to supporting the generation coming behind them. Several of our giants have served as diplomats in residence and/or served in universities to mentor in other ways. For some of our giants in the making, the project has afforded an opportunity to give back. Aaron had already modeled for them what it means to support the next generation. C. D. Glin said, "To be asked and to just know that this is such an important project by such an important man whom I have called on in every instance of transition probably over the past fifteen years in one way or another, it definitely was humbling and an honor." In reflecting on Aaron's mentorship of her and others, like Paul Weisenfeld, Sundaa Bridgett-Jones shared, "We need to do that for Taylor and others—invite them in our homes and let them see both our achievements and our vulnerabilities."

Our giants—no matter how old or experienced—have one very important thing in common: They all want to see more of you in this arena and in leadership positions. They want to see and help you succeed. And so they were willing to talk about the good, the bad, and the



ugly. And they were willing to move outside their comfort zone to do so. Ambassador Johnny Young told us, “I hate to talk about myself, really. There’s nothing that I dislike more.” We told them, we want this to be informal, like you’re talking to friends. You don’t know that they are your friends, but by the end of the book, we want you to feel like they—our giants—are your friends. This book is their gift, and it is our gift to you.

## **Notes**

1. See “African-American Ambassadors,” Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, April 2016, <https://adst.org/african-american-ambassadors>.

2. These are foreign service recruitment programs offering graduate school assistance, paid internships and special trainings, and a guaranteed job for qualified participants. See Chapter 2.

3. Carolyn R. Payton was the first Black director of Peace Corps (1977–1978), when it was a part of ACTION, a consolidated service agency that included Peace Corps, Vista, and other service programs.