

BPIA BULLETIN

The Newsletter of the Association of Black Professionals in International Affairs

About the Association

BPIA is a charitable, non-profit membership association founded in 1989 to increase the involvement of African Americans and other people of African heritage in international affairs.

Founder, Barbara C. Patterson

President, Sylvia Stanfield, US Ambassador (ret.)

Vice President, Business and Economic Envelopment, J. Calvin Williams

Vice President, Education and Exchange, John-Ubong Silas

Vice President, Professional Development, Earl Yates

Secretary, Ayla-Rebeka Brooks

Assistant Secretary, Zainabu Williams

Treasurer, Cory Bullock

Historian, Cynthia Johnson

Board Members-at-Large

Lassine Cherif

C. Steven McGann, US Ambassador (ret.)

Sandile Hlatsbwayo, Ph.D.

What's Inside

BPIA had lots going in winter 2018. On January 27, our mentoring workshop brought together seasoned international affairs practitioners, students, and young professionals for some straight talk career guidance (page 2). Later that day, BPIA members assembled for their Annual Meeting (page 3), where they learned about the state of the association, and elected members to the Board of Directors (this page, left, and page 7). Eager to hit the ground running, the new Board members proposed that the association host an event as early as the next month! Coverage of the resulting Black History Month Networking Soirée is on page 2. We 'open' a BPIA member's recent book on page 4. Our series on notable international workplaces in the DC Metro continues with a visit to the headquarters of the US Peace Corps (page 5). Finally, before 2017 gave way to the New Year, BPIA and the US African Development Foundation co-hosted a richly informative Economic Outlook forum on Africa. Read about it on page 6. On the inside back cover, see "On the Calendar" for upcoming international affairs events.

BPIA Bulletin is a quarterly publication. Persons interested in contributing/subscribing to the newsletter should email the Editor, Dr. Michele Cisco Titi, at upwardway17@gmail.com.



Professional Development and Mentoring Workshop

On January 27, an impressive group of 10 international affairs mentor/practitioners met with 20 new and aspiring international affairs mentees for a BPIA-sponsored dialogue on mentoring for professional development. Board member Earl Yates coordinated the event, which was held at the Washington offices of the United Negro College Fund.

Facilitated by Peace Corps Advisor Yvonne Hubbard, the workshop drew participants affiliated with more than a dozen organizations, including the Association of Black American Ambassadors, the State Department, Howard University, the Pickering and Rangel fellowship programs, the US Congress, and the World Bank. Several points of consensus emerged from the dialogue:



- Mentoring is critical to professional development because it helps mentees to: “learn the ropes” from seasoned professionals; enhance their negotiating skills; chart a career path; engage with a mentor as a “sounding board” for career consultation; and build contacts and networks.
- Well-structured mentoring initiatives can: build professional resiliency by providing timely information; guide self-monitoring and assessment; and provide “staged support” through a framework of resources and opportunities.
- For this workshop to prove valuable: such events must be continued, each providing professional networking and skills development/career enhancement components; BPIA’s reach should be expanded with increased and more sophisticated use of social media; BPIA’s membership should be expanded, with a view to reaching geographic areas, communities, and campuses where there is low awareness about international affairs careers.

The program provided BPIA with an excellent roadmap for development of its mentorship program.

Black History Month Soirée

BPIA closed out Black History Month 2018 with a Networking and Mentoring Soirée on February 22, co-hosted by the Washington Center. The evening’s theme was “Looking Forward and Giving Back.” A crowd of more than 70 people enjoyed food and drink, and met like-minded international career practitioners and aspirants. BPIA President, Ambassador (ret.) Sylvia Stanfield greeted the group, informing them about the origins of the association and its plans for 2018. Sherrod Williams, Washington Center Senior Director of Academic Internship Programs, also welcomed the guests and told them about the organization’s work on DC internships for students. BPIA Vice President for Professional Development Earl Yates shared results of the recent Mentoring Workshop (see above). **See pictures on page 4.**

Annual Meeting

BPIA held its annual membership meeting January 27, 2018. Retired US Ambassador Sylvia Stanfield, Board President (right), delivered the *State of BPIA* report, and Historian Cynthia Johnson conducted the election of Board members. The new roster is on the front page. Biodata on the new members (pictured below) are on page 7.



Opening her remarks, Amb. Stanfield recalled the founding of BPIA by international educator Barbara C. Patterson in 1989, a time “when professionally prepared blacks encountered difficulty finding employment” in the international public and private sectors. The association aimed to increase the involvement of blacks in international affairs through educational, economic, cultural exchange and professional development programs. BPIA thrived during its first decade, then fell into a period of low activity. It is now on the road to rejuvenation. Following are highlights of the President’s report:

- The Board, aided by a dedicated group of volunteers, has kept BPIA “engaged and moving forward.” Stanfield acknowledged Board members John Calvin (Cal) Williams, Cory Bullock, Cynthia Johnson, Lassine Cherif, Amb. (ret.) Steve McGann, Past Board President Earl Yates; and outgoing members from 2017: Leroy Jackson, Brenda Arrington, Shanelle Chambers, Alexandria Maloney, and Rhonda Ferguson-Augustus. She thanked volunteers Zainabu Williams, Ayla-Rebeka Brooks, Jana Alston, Guled Hersi, Cierra Saylor, Krystal Norman, Dr. Jeanne Toungara, and Dr. Michele Titi, newsletter editor.
- Since BPIA programs and activities are membership-funded, without a robust membership role, its operating /program funds are significantly less than in past years. Still, the Board is working diligently to make the most effective/efficient use of the funds by reducing administrative costs, e.g., terminating the lease on the Georgia Avenue office and putting records, supplies and office furniture into storage.
- BPIA’s 2017 programming was strong and well-received: a Spring Networking event at a K Street venue (80+ guests); a Fall Career Outreach program at Howard University’s Bunche Center with SRO attendance; the Africa economic forum in November at CEIP (page 6); and the December mentoring workshop (page 2). The *BPIA Bulletin* newsletter, and the web site managed by Board member



Newcomers to the BPIA Board:
Zainabu Williams, Sandile
Hlatsbwayo, Ph.D., John-Ubong
Silas, Ayla-Rebeka Brooks

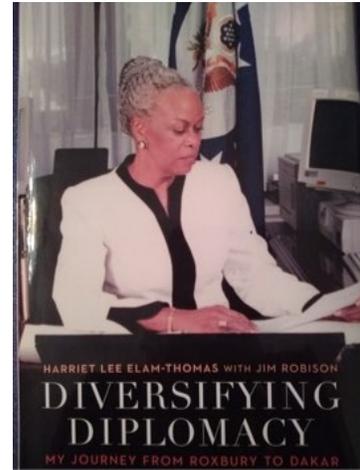
Lassine Cherif, are keeping the membership informed.

- Ahead for 2018: capacity building for the Board; finding affordable office space; engaging more volunteers for program expansion; growing the membership; upgrading the web site and making greater/better use of social media; building upon and expanding the program successes of the last year.

The President closed by citing “the difficult times” in which we now find ourselves “on our domestic and international stage,” and the imperative of BPIA members’ civic engagement. “... Lend a hand and join in our efforts!” she urged.

The Long Road From Roxbury to Dakar

Seasoned diplomats, aspiring ones, or anyone curious about America’s Foreign Service will find Harriet Elam-Thomas’ *Diversifying Diplomacy* an absorbing read. Sub-titled *My Journey From Roxbury to Dakar*, the memoir “traces the modern diplomatic history of the United States” through this former US Ambassador to Senegal’s personal experience. The book details her unique and informative encounters and challenges as an American/woman/woman of color over her 42 years of diplomatic assignments in Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, France, Belgium, Mali, Senegal, and Ivory Coast. The well-written volume also includes such points of interest as what a diplomat’s hairstyles can communicate, and in-service marriage over 50.



At a December 12 book launch event at the Petworth DC Public Library branch, Elam-Thomas, an early BPIA member-supporter, told her audience that a successful foreign service career is achievable “if you have the drive, ambition, and determination, no matter where you came from.” She advised them, a number of whom were students and young professionals, that, “You don’t have to have an international affairs degree to pass the Foreign Service exams,” but that you “have to be culturally sensitive.” She urged them to “Explore the real experience of being abroad,” and to be curious and informed about world affairs. “Read the first two pages of *The Economist*,” she advised. “Listen to NPR once in a while.” She recommended reading *The Guardian* and *Le Figaro* as well.

For more information on the book and the author, who now directs the University of Central Florida Diplomacy Program, visit www.diversifyingdiplomacy.com.

Pictures from the BPIA Black History Month Mentoring Soirée (continued from page 2)



Workplaces of Note in the DMV: US Peace Corps Headquarters

Perhaps the best of President John F. Kennedy's legacy to America and the world, the US Peace Corps (www.peacecorps.gov) turned 57 this year. The agency seeks "to promote world peace and friendship" by sending Volunteers to live and work on development projects at the grass roots with people of interested countries. The work of the more than 7,300 Volunteers in 65 countries is administered from the agency's headquarters in Washington, DC.

BPIA Bulletin recently visited Peace Corps' L Street, NW offices. We met with Dominique Gebru, (right) a Public Affairs Specialist and returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV, Jamaica); Byron L. Williams (below right), a Diversity Outreach Specialist (RPCV, Lesotho, Ukraine); and Yvonne Hubbard (below, left) Advisor, (RPCV, Sierra Leone). Kiiva Williams, a Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist, joined the conversation from the Dallas office by phone.



While Peace Corps service is not a requirement for employment, about 50% of the staff are returned Volunteers. Internationally related experience is preferred, if not required, for most Peace Corps jobs. The agency has a "Five Year Rule:" (With certain exceptions) an employee cannot work at the agency longer than five consecutive years at a time. The aim is to maintain the flow of "fresh ideas and innovation" throughout the organization. Peace Corps offers a wide range of positions, including internships. A medical unit serves Volunteers. Communications, finance, IT, legal, and project area specializations are just a few of the areas of staff expertise. Most positions require undergraduate to advanced degrees. The agency also offers internships.

Asked about their duties, Gebru said that she gets to "tell the story of Peace Corps" so that Americans can better understand the impact of the Volunteers' work abroad and after their return from service. Kiiva Williams' job is to "reach the masses," encouraging them to consider Peace Corps service. Byron Williams works to improve application rates and interest in Peace Corps along "diversity dimensions" including race, ethnicity, age (50+), sexual orientation, and physical ability. Hubbard, an Advisor, works with Human Resources to diversify the ranks of the agency's country directors, so that they "look like the diversity in America."



"What's the best thing about working at Peace Corps?" we asked. "Getting to talk to people of color about experiences abroad," said Bryan Williams. "I didn't know about any of this in high school," he added. Kiiiva Williams likes working "with an amazing group of people who are passionate and skilled." Gebru likes "helping Volunteers to share their stories" and working with a team of "people who are eager to try new ideas." Hubbard enjoys working "to get more people of color, people who can support all dimensions of Volunteers in the field" into the agency. This is her second return to Peace Corps; in her first, she helped set up the South Africa post in the late 1990s.

African Economic Outlook Forum

On November 21, 2017, BPIA and the US African Development Foundation (USADF) held a Business and Economic Outlook Africa Forum at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Board members John Calvin Williams and Brenda Arrington produced one panel on the IMF's October 2017 *Regional Economic Outlook Sub-Saharan Africa* report, and the work of two organizations that promote economic and business development in Africa; a second on doing business in Africa. Williams (far right) moderated both.



On Panel 1, Jaroslaw Wieczorek (above left), Deputy Division Chief, African Department Regional Studies Division, International Monetary Fund, presented highlights of the Regional Economic Outlook. The report divided sub-Saharan African countries into three categories: the oil producers, “other resource-intensive” countries, and “non-resource-intensive” nations. Wieczorek noted the report predicted a modest growth recovery to 2.6% in 2017, reflecting one-off factors such as recovery of oil production in Nigeria, an easing of drought conditions in eastern and southern Africa, and a slightly improved external environment, but the underlying situation remains difficult. Growth is projected to increase to 3.4% in 2018.

C.D. Glin (second from left), President and CEO of the US African Development Foundation (USADF), discussed the work of the independent federal agency, a provider of seed capital and technical support. Their approach promotes “bottom-up development,” providing some \$30 million/year to African organizations able to execute projects without intermediaries, using local technical assistance. Some African governments match USADF funding. The agency currently works in 20 countries, and is seeking more partners.

Florizelle Liser (third from left), President and CEO of the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA), was the final Panel 1 presenter. CCA is major business association that promotes business and investment between the US and African nations. Its members — US and African companies of all sizes, as well as NGOs — enjoy membership benefits such as the association's major conferences and trade missions. Liser seeks to impress upon them “the imperative of being in Africa” but warns them to be prepared for competition from Europeans and Asians. Importantly, CCA also encourages regional trade in Africa, which, Liser notes, “trades the least with itself than any other continent.”



Carlos Rivera (left, at left) President of Vysnova Partners, an international consultancy, opened Panel 2. There are “plenty of opportunities,” he said, to do business in Africa, adding that “You need to do your research.” Time zones, currency fluctuations, banking, and human resources require much “time and energy.” Rivera also emphasized the importance of respecting local staff.

The evening's final presenter was Martin Ezemma (left, at right), Director, International Business, Prince Georges County Economic Development Corporation (PG-EDC). He described PG-EDC's “resource based approach” to promoting the global interests of county businesses. They administer state-level grant programs, match businesses with potential investors, and conduct trade missions to African countries. He urges county businesses interested in Africa to “find potential host country nationals to work with, to be practical, to travel and to be on the ground.”

On the Calendar

Monday, March 26, 12:00 noon - Briefing on the Importance of Cross-Cultural Communication, and Tour of US Diplomacy Center - US Department of State, 2201 C St., NW (21st St. entrance), Washington, DC 20520, hosted by Miss Black DC US Ambassador with support of BPIA and Howard University International Affairs Society. **RSVP by March 22 to <http://bit.ly/2HuHBpg>**

Thursday, March 28, 5:00 - 6:30 pm - SIS@60 looks at international education: Where are we and what does the future hold? - American University School of International Service (SIS), 4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW 20016, with Fanta Aw, VP of Campus Life and Allan E. Goodman, President, Institute of International Education. **Call SIS, 202.885.1747; sisevents@american.edu.**

Saturday, March 31, 11:00 am - 5:00 pm - Ujamaa Book Festival - Hilton Alexandria Mark Center, 5000 Seminary Rd., Alexandria, VA 22311. Amb. (ret.) Harriet Elam-Thomas, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, featured authors. **Call Harambee Books & Artworks, 703.299.2591; <https://harambeebooks.org>**

Wednesday, April 4, 12:30-1:45 pm - "Muslim Americans: Debating the Notions of American and Un-American" - Georgetown University Bunn Intercultural Center, 37th & O Sts., NW, Washington, DC 20057, with Nahid Afrose Kabir, Ph.D. **E-mail as3831@georgetown.edu**

Four Join BPIA Board

BPIA's new Board members (see photo, page 3) bring impressive credentials to the table. The new leaders are:

Zainabu Williams, Assistant Secretary — Desk Officer for Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu at the US Department of State. She has also served at posts in Ghana and Brazil. Before joining the Foreign Service, Ms. Williams worked for four years at US Customs and Border Protection, arranging training programs for customs officials in East Asia. She earned her bachelor's degree from the Pennsylvania State University (Business, Japanese); and a master's from American University (International Communications).

Sandile Hlatshwayo, Ph.D., Member-at-Large — Economist at the International Monetary Fund. She earned a bachelor's in Economics and Political Science from Spelman College, a master's in International Policy Studies from Stanford University, and a doctorate in Economics from UC Berkeley. Prior to graduate school, she worked as a policy analyst at a South African think tank, and also in the private sector at Procter & Gamble in that country.

John-Ubong Silas, Vice President, Education and Exchange -- Vice President of Partnership at LDI Africa, a firm that facilitates pro bono international fellowship opportunities for mid-level professionals. His previous service includes positions at the Partnership for Public Service, US Department of Commerce, and the office of Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-FL). He earned a bachelor's in Journalism from the University of Florida and a master's in Public Communication from American University.

Ayla-Rebeka Brooks, Secretary -- Contracting Officer at the Millennium Challenge Corporation. She was previously employed by the Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, having started her public service career in 2009 as an intern in the Department of the Interior's Government-wide Acquisition Management Program. Ms. Brooks received a bachelor's degree in Economics from Rowan University with a double minor in Spanish and Business Administration and a concentration in International Studies. She also holds an MPA from American University.

Join BPIA today! Visit <http://www.iabpia.org>. On the home page, click on Become a Member.

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