

Critical Pedagogy and Diplomacy: Examining HBCUs' Role in Developing Global Leaders

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Abstract

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have long been at the forefront of promoting educational equity and social justice. This study explores the role of critical pedagogy at HBCUs in shaping global leaders who graduated between 1900 and 1980. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research examines how an education grounded in social justice principles influenced the careers of seven global leaders. Through archival research and document analysis, the study investigates how these leaders challenged systemic oppression and contributed to global change. The findings highlight key implications for higher education and global leadership, underscoring the potential of HBCUs to foster more inclusive approaches to diplomacy.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); critical pedagogy; global leadership; diplomacy; social justice

Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been integral to the advancement of educational equity and social justice in the United States. Established in the face of pervasive systemic racism and exclusion, HBCUs have provided access to higher education for Black Americans and fostered a tradition of cultivating leaders committed to confronting societal inequities. These institutions are recognized for their impact on domestic social movements and educational reform, yet their role in shaping global leadership—especially in the context of U.S. diplomacy—remains underexplored. This research investigates the critical, yet often overlooked, role of HBCUs in shaping global leaders through critical pedagogy.

This paper is guided by three research questions:

1. In what ways do HBCUs shape U.S. diplomacy and international relations through the principles of critical pedagogy?
2. How does diversity within HBCUs influence the development of global leaders?

3. What challenges do African American diplomats encounter, and how can the pedagogy of HBCUs help address and overcome these challenges?

Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux, and Peter McLaren argue that critical pedagogy empowers students to engage with and challenge systemic power structures. This approach promotes the deconstruction of hegemonic narratives, providing students with the analytical skills and values needed to advance social justice and human rights. In the context of HBCUs, critical pedagogy forms the foundation for developing future leaders equipped to address contemporary diplomatic challenges and committed to reshaping global power dynamics. Through a qualitative case study, this research examines how an education rooted in social justice principles influenced the careers of seven global leaders, including Ambassador Edward Dudley, Dr. Felicia Davis, Dr. Charles Drew, and Leon Sullivan. The study uses archival research and document analysis to explore how these leaders confronted systemic oppression and contributed to global change.

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a gap in existing scholarship regarding the role of HBCUs in shaping U.S. diplomacy and global leadership. While scholars have extensively documented the domestic impact of these institutions, their contributions to international relations — particularly in developing diplomats and global leaders — remain understudied. Second, by applying critical pedagogy, this paper demonstrates how HBCUs empower students to challenge dominant geopolitical narratives, promoting global citizenship grounded in social justice principles. Finally, the findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of how higher education can better prepare students for careers in diplomacy. They elucidate the role of HBCUs in shaping U.S. foreign policy by cultivating a generation of global leaders. Furthermore, the research highlights the significance of incorporating social justice principles into educational curricula, with potential implications for the evolution of U.S. diplomacy and international relations.

The thesis of this paper posits that HBCUs, rooted in critical pedagogy, play an underestimated role in shaping international relations by producing leaders who transform U.S. diplomacy. The subsequent sections examine the historical and contemporary contributions of HBCUs within the U.S. educational landscape, explore the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy, and assess the broader impact of HBCU educational practices on U.S. diplomacy.

This research aims to illuminate the influence of HBCUs in cultivating the next generation of leaders.

Theoretical Foundations of Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy transforms the power dynamics inherent in oppressive systems, fostering empowerment and the humanization of learners (Kincheloe, 2005). Rooted in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy draws heavily from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, with thinkers such as Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas shaping its foundational concepts. Critical theory focuses on creating a just society where individuals hold political, economic, and cultural autonomy (Kincheloe, 2005). It seeks to dismantle oppressive structures and asserts that achieving social justice and equality depends on the liberation and empowerment of marginalized communities (Freire, 1970). As a framework, critical pedagogy challenges the status quo by emphasizing the political dimensions of education and positioning it as a tool for social transformation (Giroux, 1997).

Freire's contributions to critical pedagogy are significant, as his theories assert that education should challenge and transform existing power structures rather than merely reinforce them. A central tenet of critical pedagogy is the rejection of traditional, authoritarian forms of education, in which teachers are the sole bearers of knowledge and students passively receive it. This model reinforces social inequalities by treating students as objects of education rather than as subjects capable of critical reflection and action (Freire, 1970). In contrast, critical pedagogy promotes 'problem-posing' education, where learners engage in dialogue, critically analyze their social contexts, and work toward societal transformation. This approach cultivates critical consciousness, enabling students to understand and address the structural forces that perpetuate inequality (Freire, 1970).

A key component of critical pedagogy emphasizes praxis is reflective action that leads to transformative change. Giroux (1997) argues that education under critical pedagogy is not merely an academic pursuit but a form of political practice aimed at achieving justice. This view aligns with Freire's assertion that education is inherently political, positioning the classroom as a site of struggle where society's oppressive structures can be critiqued and challenged (Freire, 1985). Critical pedagogy empowers students to take an active role in acquiring knowledge, encouraging them to recognize the significance of context and experience in shaping their understanding of the world (McLaren, 1989). Therefore, developing critical consciousness

through education compels students to take the lead in their learning and recognize the broader political and social forces that shape their lives (Shannon, 1992).

Critical pedagogy emphasizes addressing social justice and equity within educational practices. Kessing-Styles (2003) asserts that critical pedagogy focuses on recognizing and confronting inequalities within educational institutions, aiming to create conditions where marginalized individuals can reclaim their voices and identities. This focus on marginalized groups' voices is central to the critical pedagogy framework, as it encourages students to recognize the forces shaping their social positioning and to act collectively to change those conditions (Freire, 1970). By fostering critical consciousness, critical pedagogy empowers learners to challenge the dominant narratives that perpetuate oppression, positioning them as agents of social change. This aligns with Freire's belief that education should not be neutral but should actively contribute to creating a just and equitable society (Freire, 1985).

Defining U.S. Diplomacy and Its Role in International Relations

U.S. diplomacy refers to the strategies, practices, and activities employed by the United States government to manage its foreign relations and engage with other nations. This process involves negotiation, communication, and representation, advancing U.S. national interests and security. Through diplomatic channels, the U.S. seeks to address matters such as trade, security, human rights, environmental protection, and conflict resolution. U.S. diplomacy is mainly executed by high-level officials, but the majority of the day-to-day work is handled by Foreign Service officers, who serve in embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions worldwide. These diplomats facilitate international agreements, maintain bilateral and multilateral relations, and ensure the protection of U.S. citizens and interests abroad (Diplo, n.d.).

U.S. diplomacy plays a critical role in shaping international relations by utilizing negotiation, communication, and representation to achieve national interests and promote global stability. It facilitates the management of foreign relations through both bilateral and multilateral frameworks, expanding its reach from direct state-to-state negotiations to participation in international organizations like the United Nations. U.S. diplomats, particularly those within the Foreign Service, are integral to this process, working in embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions to foster communication, negotiate agreements, and address global issues such as security, trade, and international law. Through their efforts, U.S. diplomacy helps navigate complex international challenges, engage with global stakeholders, and advance the broader

strategic goals of U.S. foreign policy. Diplomacy thus functions as a vital instrument for promoting American interests, resolving conflicts, and contributing to international cooperation and peace (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.).

Literature Review

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) play a central role in higher education for African Americans, despite comprising only three percent of the nation's colleges and universities. They award 28 percent of Black bachelor's degrees, 16 percent of first-professional degrees, and nine percent of Black doctoral degrees. HBCUs produce 75 percent of Black PhDs, 46 percent of Black executives, 50 percent of Black engineers, and 65 percent of Black doctors. These statistics reinforce HBCUs' significance in developing Black talent and shaping leadership across various sectors (Wilson, 2008).

HBCUs emerged in the early 19th century to provide educational opportunities for Black Americans who faced exclusion from predominantly white institutions (PWIs) due to racial discrimination. In 1837, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania became the first HBCU, followed by institutions such as Lincoln University (1854) and Howard University (1867). These schools arose to meet the need for Black students to pursue higher education in a society where slavery had restricted their access to learning. During Reconstruction, HBCUs played a critical role in training Black teachers, professionals, and community leaders who contributed to the social and political uplift of African Americans. The Morrill Act of 1890 granted land-grant status to Black colleges, further strengthening their ability to offer technical and agricultural education (Palmer, 2011).

The landscape of higher education in the United States changed after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which had profound consequences for HBCUs (Brown & Davis, 2001). These institutions, once the primary avenues for higher education for Black Americans, now faced an evolving reality: Black students no longer relied solely on HBCUs for their education. This shift challenged HBCU administrators to redefine their institutions' relevance and viability in an increasingly diverse and competitive academic environment. As a result, HBCUs have consistently redefined their missions to ensure their success while continuing to provide educational opportunities for Black students (Gasman, 2009). Importantly, HBCUs emphasize community service as a core part of their mission. Gasman and McMickens (2010) found that most mission statements of HBCUs stress the

importance of community service and civic engagement. This reflects HBCUs' longstanding role as cultural and community centers, where academic growth intertwines with service to local and broader communities (Freeman & Cohen, 2001). As HBCUs move forward, administrators and faculty must address the challenges posed by economic constraints, increasing competition, and shifting demographics. Challenges include securing adequate funding, developing strong alumni networks, and expanding these institutions' reach both nationally and globally (Mbajekwe, 2006). Black philanthropic support for HBCUs has historically been robust, suggesting that there is potential to build on this tradition of giving to secure financial resources for future growth (Gasman, 2002).

The Application of Critical Pedagogy in HBCUs

The integration of international perspectives through critical pedagogy is a vital approach at HBCUs. By cultivating global partnerships, these institutions compel students to investigate complex issues related to social justice, identity, and global inequality, prompting them to challenge dominant narratives and adopt diverse perspectives. The exchange programs and international collaborations at HBCUs, such as those facilitated through the Fulbright Program, are valuable tools for advancing this pedagogical approach. The Fulbright Program is a U.S. government-funded initiative that promotes international educational exchange by providing grants for students, scholars, and professionals to study, teach, and conduct research abroad, fostering mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries.

For instance, Huston-Tillotson University (HTU) in Austin, Texas, illustrates how HBCUs incorporate international perspectives into their curricula through the Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence program. In response to the university's need to expand its computer science and engineering offerings, HTU hosted Professor Manoj Kapil, a Fulbright Scholar from India's Swami Vivekanand Subharti University. Kapil's visit contributed to the development of HTU's STEM MBA program and introduced students to global perspectives on technology, cyber security, and web programming (United Negro College Fund, 2024). Through this partnership, HTU enhanced its curriculum and encouraged critical discussions about the role of technology in addressing systemic inequalities. Kapil's active participation in campus events, such as the multicultural festival and the Study Abroad Committee, further fostered an environment of cultural exchange, enhancing students' understanding of the global economy and social justice (United Negro College Fund, 2024).

Xavier University of Louisiana has also benefited from international collaboration through the Fulbright Outreach Lecturing Fund. The university invited Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama, a Jamaican filmmaker and scholar, to engage with students and faculty in its African American and Diaspora Studies department. Tafari-Ama's lecture on her curatorial project, *Rum, Sweat, and Tears*, addressed the historical sale of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States, fostering a critical conversation about the impact of colonialism and the African Diaspora (United Negro College Fund, 2024). This interaction exemplifies how the Fulbright program facilitates interdisciplinary scholarship that encourages students to analyze the global impact of historical events and their contemporary implications.

Furthermore, the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program further strengthens HBCUs' international engagement by offering students immersive language experiences. Institutions such as Jarvis Christian University and Bennett College have hosted FLTAs from Taiwan, Kenya, and Morocco, enriching their language departments and broader curricula. The program enriches language proficiency and allows students to interact directly with native speakers, deepening their understanding of diverse cultures and worldviews (United Negro College Fund, 2024).

Moreover, LeMoyne-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee, has emphasized the importance of hosting FLTAs as part of its broader global strategy. The college's ability to offer Swahili, Chinese, and Portuguese has broadened students' academic and career opportunities, preparing them for success in a globalized workforce (United Negro College Fund, 2024). The program not only exposes students to new languages but also promotes cultural exchange, enhancing their ability to navigate complex global networks of knowledge, work, and activism.

A cornerstone of Spelman College's pedagogical approach is its focus on applying theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges – a central principle of critical pedagogy. As of 2024, 56 Spelman College students have participated in the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, a U.S. government initiative that provides Spelman students and faculty with opportunities to engage in an international exchange that equips its students with the tools to participate in global discussions and address complex issues, helping them develop the capacity to engage with and challenge global injustices. This initiative integrates community engagement, social justice, and critical thinking — key elements of critical pedagogy. Spelman's recognition as a 2024 Fulbright U.S. Student Program HBCU Institutional Leader affirms its dedication to fostering cross-

cultural collaboration and developing socially conscious leaders (Spelman College, n.d., *Spelman College Named Fulbright HBCU Institutional Leader by U.S. Department of State*). By offering students opportunities to study, teach, and conduct research abroad, Spelman promotes critical analysis of global social and political issues, encouraging students to adopt an informed and action-oriented approach to these challenges. Spelman's involvement in the Fulbright Program also enriches faculty development and fosters collaborative research. Faculty who participates in Fulbright exchanges bring back diverse global perspectives that enhance Spelman's curriculum and promote innovative teaching practices aligned with critical pedagogy.

Furthermore, Spelman College's Bonner Office of Civic Engagement facilitates student involvement in initiatives such as the SpelREADS literacy program, which directly addresses educational disparities. Through SpelREADS, Spelman students tutor underserved children in Atlanta Public Schools, providing one-on-one literacy support (Taskforce on Higher Education, n.d.). SpelREADS exemplifies the principles of critical pedagogy by enabling students to examine the social structures that perpetuate educational inequities. Students apply academic knowledge to social issues, gaining practical experience in addressing systemic challenges related to poverty, race, and unequal access to educational resources (Merod, 2021).

Moreover, the Women's Research and Resource Center (WRRRC) at Spelman College plays a pioneering role in teaching, research, and advocacy for human rights, healthcare, and leadership development. As the first women's research center at an HBCU and the first to offer a women's studies major, the WRRRC has significantly shaped the academic landscape. Throughout its 35-year history, supported by the Ford Foundation, the WRRRC has facilitated leadership development for both faculty and students, collaborated with other departments to establish new courses, and fostered international linkages with universities worldwide to promote faculty and student development (Spelman College, n.d., *Women's Research and Resource Center*).

Additionally, the WRRRC hosts events that examine the lives of African and African-descended women within diverse cultural contexts. This interdisciplinary approach allows students to critically engage with social structures and norms, empowering them to challenge systemic inequalities. The WRRRC exemplifies the integration of critical pedagogy by fostering a learning environment where students engage with academic theories and apply them to real-world activism and leadership (Spelman College, n.d., *Women's Research and Resource Center*).

Through these initiatives, Spelman cultivates critical consciousness in students, empowering them to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems — a central tenet of critical pedagogy.

Tougaloo College's commitment to social justice is deeply rooted in its historical role in the Civil Rights Movement. This institution has long been associated with civil rights activism. It served as the final staging site for James Meredith's "March Against Fear" in 1966, and its students, known as the Tougaloo Nine, participated in Mississippi's first civil rights read-in at the Jackson Municipal Library in 1961 (Veal, 2020). Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King Jr. have contributed to the institution's historical legacy of activism, and these figures continue to influence the college's mission (Veal, 2020).

By promoting a student-centered approach to learning, Tougaloo empowers students to analyze and confront societal inequities. This pedagogical approach is evident in the college's development of the Reuben V. Anderson Institute for Social Justice. The Institute integrates theory and practice, providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to address systemic oppression in education, healthcare, and criminal justice. Students engage in both classroom learning and practical community-based experiences that address issues of racial equity and social justice (Reuben V. Anderson Center for Justice, n.d.). This dual approach exemplifies a core tenet of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of linking academic knowledge with active participation in real-world societal issues. Critical pedagogy at Tougaloo emphasizes engagement with real-world issues and the application of academic knowledge to activism. As President Dr. Carmen Walters asserts, education is the highest form of protest (Veal, 2020), and the institution encourages students to take ownership of social activism and social responsibility. By analyzing the role of policy, understanding legislative bills, and participating in community advocacy, students directly impact social change (Veal, 2020). These initiatives align with the core principles of critical pedagogy, as they empower students not only to question existing systems but also to work toward dismantling those systems through active engagement. Through these initiatives, Tougaloo College continues to cultivate ethical leaders and change agents committed to dismantling systems of oppression and promoting racial equity.

Partnerships have been advantageous in advancing the integration of critical pedagogy within HBCUs. The Strada HBCU Initiative partners with 49 HBCUs to strengthen leadership development and career readiness while advancing the principles of critical pedagogy. The

Strada HBCU Initiative directly aligns with this pedagogical approach by providing financial and institutional support to HBCUs, which have historically contributed to the educational and economic mobility of marginalized communities (Freire, 2000).

The \$25 million initiative amplifies the vital work that HBCUs already do, investing in resources that support the development of socially conscious leaders. Through scholarships, internships, study-abroad opportunities, and leadership training, Strada enhances access to education and career opportunities, which in turn facilitates engagement with local and global issues (Strada, n.d.). By fostering work-based learning and global exchanges, the initiative enables students to bridge the gap between education and professional success while promoting critical analysis of societal structures. This approach mirrors critical pedagogy's emphasis on engaging students in real-world issues and empowering them to enact social change (Giroux, 1997).

The Strada HBCU Initiative also focuses on faculty development, which further strengthens HBCUs' capacity to incorporate critical pedagogy into their curricula. Through the Strada HBCU Initiative, faculty members receive support to develop innovative teaching practices that center on community-based learning, participatory action research, and critical reflection. This multidirectional exchange — between faculty, students, and the wider academic community — creates an environment where knowledge production is a collaborative process, grounded in critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000).

HBCUs' Role in Shaping U.S. Diplomacy and International Relations

HBCUs play a significant role in fostering global awareness and participation in international relations, particularly through the lens of study abroad programs. While traditionally underrepresented in global education, recent trends demonstrate a growing commitment to sending students abroad, with significant implications for U.S. diplomacy and international engagement (Redden, 2018).

According to the Institute of International Education, in the 2015-2016 academic year, 2,036 students from HBCUs studied abroad – a significant increase from 1,605 students in 2013-2014. For example, Tuskegee University increased its study abroad participation from 32 students in 2015 to 65 students the following year, a direct result of a more robust global office and a commitment to expanding international opportunities. Additionally, Spelman College has become a leader among HBCUs in global education, with study abroad participation rising from

218 students in 2012 to 406 students in 2018. Spelman's commitment to ensuring that every student has a global experience before graduation resulted in 75 percent of its student body studying abroad (Redden, 2018).

Short-term study abroad programs are particularly popular among HBCU students, with 86 percent of HBCU students participating in programs lasting eight weeks or fewer, compared to 63 percent of students across all institutions. Furthermore, HBCU students tend to favor destinations in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, where they can connect with their heritage and explore cultural and historical ties (Redden, 2018).

Partnerships between HBCUs and study abroad organizations further underscore the growing importance of international exposure for these students. For instance, Howard University launched the HU/COL Avanza initiative, a strategic partnership aimed at engaging with Colombia to create interdisciplinary opportunities for mutual growth. The initiative seeks to deepen collaboration between Howard University and Colombian institutions, particularly in the Pacific region, which is home to the majority of Afro-Colombians (Pope-Johns, 2021). This partnership builds on President Wayne A.I. Frederick's 2018 visit to Colombia, where he met with local students and communities to better understand the educational and socio-economic landscape. Following the visit, Howard University strengthened its ties with Colombian universities, including Universidad Santiago de Cali, with which it signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) in 2018. The partnership also led to a semester-long study abroad program focused on race, ethnicity, and identity, which was launched in 2019 with support from CET Academic Programs (Pope-Johns, 2021).

The HU/COL Avanza initiative serves to provide Howard University students and faculty with enriching international experiences while enhancing their Spanish language skills. By engaging in education, research, and collaborative projects, Howard aims to contribute to the advancement of people of African descent in Colombia, with a particular emphasis on areas such as health care, education, and entrepreneurship. The initiative is especially committed to uplifting communities in the departments of Chocó, Valle de Cauca, Cauca, and Nariño, where Afro-Colombians make up a significant portion of the population (Pope-Johns, 2021).

According to a 2019 government survey, nearly 10 percent of Colombia's population identifies as Afro-descendant. This demographic, historically marginalized, stands to benefit greatly from the educational and community-building efforts driven by the HU/COL Avanza

initiative. Through this comprehensive strategy, Howard University plays a vital role in shaping U.S.-Colombia relations, positioning itself as a key partner in advancing educational opportunities, economic development, and cultural exchange between the two nations (Pope-Johns, 2021).

Cheyney University of Pennsylvania has significantly contributed to U.S.-Africa relations by hosting delegations from African governments. Through these interactions, Cheyney has reinforced its role as a bridge between the U.S. and African nations, enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation on various global challenges. The university's alumni network further strengthens this connection, with many individuals assuming prominent roles in international non-governmental organizations. These alumni actively contribute to shaping U.S. foreign aid policies and advancing development initiatives across Africa and other regions (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2021).

A notable achievement in Cheyney's commitment to international engagement is its partnership with Obokese University of Excellence (OUE) in Ghana. This agreement, focusing on aquaculture and aquaponics, represents Cheyney's first collaboration with an African university. The partnership aims to leverage Cheyney's expertise in aquaculture to support the development of a comprehensive and sustainable aquaculture program at OUE. By addressing critical issues such as food security, this initiative has the potential to revolutionize food production in Ghana and neighboring regions. Through these efforts, Cheyney University contributes to the strengthening of U.S.-Africa relations, provides students with invaluable global perspectives, and prepares them for leadership roles in international development (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2021).

HBCUs shape U.S. diplomacy through the diverse experiences of their students. By fostering cross-cultural understanding and increasing the number of African American students engaged in international affairs, HBCUs help diversify the pool of future diplomats, international policymakers, and global leaders. This expanded representation in global spaces contributes to more inclusive and comprehensive diplomatic strategies for the United States, ensuring that the perspectives of African American communities are reflected in international relations (Redden, 2018).

Challenges Faced by African American Diplomats in U.S. Foreign Service

African Americans represent approximately 16 percent of employees in U.S. foreign policy-related agencies, compared to about 12 percent of the U.S. population. However, Black representation among foreign service officers deployed overseas is only six percent. Furthermore, the Senior Foreign Service is predominantly white, with African American officers comprising less than 3% of senior roles (Nutter, 2020). African American diplomats face challenges within the field of diplomacy deeply rooted in systemic racism, limited access to professional opportunities, and underrepresentation within foreign service institutions.

Historically, the practices of U.S. diplomatic institutions negatively impact recruitment, promotion, and career advancement. For example, although the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities within the diplomatic corps has increased, African American representation remains disproportionately low in senior ranks (Handy, 2020). African American diplomats often face bias in performance evaluations, restricted access to high-profile assignments, and slower career progression compared to their white counterparts. These biases reflect long-standing exclusionary practices that have historically kept African Americans from achieving leadership positions within the diplomatic service. After African American diplomats are recruited, they often struggle with limited support, mentorship, and networking opportunities, making it difficult to advance. The lack of career development opportunities has led many African American diplomats to leave the foreign service prematurely, resulting in a loss of human capital. These barriers have implications for both the career trajectories of individual diplomats and the broader dynamics of U.S. diplomacy. While African American diplomats have historically been at the intersection of civil rights and foreign policy activism, they have also contended with systematic restraints that have their contributions to U.S. diplomacy less visible (Williams, 2007).

Methodology

This study was conducted to explore the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in shaping global leaders, with particular attention to their influence on U.S. diplomacy and international relations. The author employed a qualitative case study approach to examine how HBCUs, through critical pedagogy, have contributed to the development of global leaders who have actively engaged in social justice advocacy and diplomatic efforts. The research investigates how the educational practices rooted in social justice principles at HBCUs have shaped the careers of seven global leaders, providing a comprehensive analysis of their contributions to global diplomacy.

Research Design: Qualitative Case Study Approach

The author utilized a qualitative case study approach to explore the impact of HBCU education on the formation of global leaders. This approach involved an in-depth examination of how HBCUs have prepared individuals to navigate and influence international relations, with an emphasis on how critical pedagogy plays a central role in shaping these leaders. The case study design was selected because it facilitates the detailed exploration of individual experiences and contributions to global diplomacy, offering rich insights into the educational foundations that contribute to the development of leaders who challenge systemic inequalities.

Sample Selection

This study examined all 107 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to understand their role in shaping global leaders. Given the vast scope of the HBCU system, a purposeful selection process was employed to narrow the focus to a subset of institutions that exemplify the critical role of HBCUs in developing leaders with global influence. The narrowing process was based on the following criteria:

- **Historical Influence:** The study focused on HBCUs with a long-standing history of producing graduates who have made significant contributions to global diplomacy, social justice, and international relations. Institutions that have been operational since the early 20th century were prioritized, as their legacy of cultivating leaders spans a substantial period. This historical context was essential in understanding the evolution of HBCUs and their impact on global leadership.
- **Curricular and Pedagogical Framework:** The research identified HBCUs known for their integration of critical pedagogy and social justice principles in their curricula. These institutions were selected based on the extent to which their educational frameworks emphasized social justice, global citizenship, and critical engagement with international issues. The study sought to highlight institutions that not only promoted academic excellence but also instilled values of leadership that contribute to international diplomacy and global change.
- **Alumni Impact on Diplomacy:** In selecting specific HBCUs for closer examination, the study considered the documented influence of their alumni on global diplomacy and international relations. Institutions that have produced a higher number of influential figures in global leadership, particularly those who have contributed to U.S. diplomacy

and international policy, were prioritized. The purpose was to explore the impact of HBCUs on the development of global leaders in diverse sectors, such as foreign service, international organizations, and global social movements.

- **Diversity of Alumni Careers:** The study aimed to examine institutions with a diverse set of alumni careers across various global fields. Therefore, HBCUs were selected where graduates have had notable roles in diplomacy, politics, humanitarian work, science, and social justice initiatives. This diversity allows for a comprehensive understanding of the different ways HBCU graduates influence global leadership and diplomacy.

Final Selection

From the population of 107 HBCUs, the author narrowed down the sample to include institutions that met these criteria and have produced graduates whose contributions have had a significant impact on global affairs. These HBCUs represent a cross-section of the broader educational landscape, demonstrating the transformative potential of critical pedagogy in developing global leaders. The author selected seven global leaders who graduated from HBCUs, with a focus on their contributions to U.S. diplomacy and international relations. These leaders were chosen based on several criteria:

- **Historical Significance:** The study included leaders whose careers reflect contributions to U.S. diplomacy, social justice, and global leadership, particularly those who have had direct engagement in shaping international relations.
- **Educational Impact:** The research prioritized individuals whose HBCU education shaped their views on U.S. diplomacy, social justice, and global leadership.
- **Diversity of Career Paths:** The sample included leaders from diverse sectors, such as diplomacy, politics, science, and civil rights, ensuring a broad representation of global leadership influenced by HBCU education.
- **Availability of Archival Materials:** The author selected individuals for whom substantial archival records, autobiographies, and documented contributions to diplomacy were available, allowing for a robust analysis of their educational experiences and subsequent careers.

The following seven individuals were selected for inclusion in the study:

- **Ambassador Edward Dudley** – The first African American ambassador, Dudley's work in Liberia reflects the direct influence of HBCU education on diplomatic leadership.

- **Ambassador Patricia Roberts Harris** – The first African American woman appointed as an ambassador, Harris’ contributions to U.S. diplomacy illustrate how HBCU graduates shape international relations.
- **Ambassador Pamela Bridgewater** – Bridgewater’s service as U.S. ambassador to Namibia highlights the diplomatic impact of HBCU education on global leadership.
- **Dr. Felicia Davis** – An advocate for women’s rights and social justice, Dr. Davis represents how HBCU education fosters leaders committed to social change.
- **Dr. David Satcher** – Former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Satcher’s contributions to global health reflect how HBCUs produce leaders who influence international health policy.
- **Dr. Ruth Simmons** – As the first African American woman to serve as president of an Ivy League institution, Dr. Simmons represents the broader impact of HBCUs on global leadership in higher education.
- **James Madison Nabrit, Jr.** – A key civil rights attorney, Nabrit’s work reflects the influence of HBCUs on global human rights and legal advocacy.

These individuals were selected due to their significant contributions to U.S. diplomacy, human rights, and international leadership, and because their educational experiences at HBCUs are believed to have profoundly influenced their career trajectories.

Data Collection Methods

The author used archival research, document analysis, and case studies to gather data on the 107 HBCUs and seven alumni. This combination of qualitative methods allows for a thorough examination of the educational practices at HBCUs and how they have shaped global leaders.

- **Archival Research:** The study involved the review of historical records from HBCUs, including institutional documents, course catalogs, and faculty rosters. These materials provided insights into the curriculum and educational philosophy that guided HBCUs’ development of leaders committed to social justice and global engagement.
- **Document Analysis:** Public records, interviews, autobiographies, and secondary sources related to the selected alumni were analyzed to assess how their HBCU education shaped their careers. These documents offered detailed accounts of their educational experiences and subsequent diplomatic and leadership contributions.

- **Case Studies:** The author developed individual case studies for each of the seven selected alumni. These case studies allowed for an in-depth exploration of how their HBCU education, grounded in social justice and critical pedagogy, influenced their leadership in global diplomacy.

Data Analysis

The author prioritized critical pedagogy, leadership development, and global engagement. This analysis identified how HBCUs, through their educational practices, prepare students to navigate global issues and contribute to international relations. The findings were interpreted through the lens of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the role of education in challenging power structures and fostering global citizenship.

The methodology employed in this study provides a rigorous framework for examining the role of HBCUs in shaping global leadership through critical pedagogy. By utilizing archival research, document analysis, and case studies, the author investigates how HBCUs contribute to the development of leaders who influence U.S. diplomacy and global relations. This research seeks to illuminate how HBCUs have prepared a generation of leaders who are equipped to address global challenges and reshape power dynamics in international diplomacy.

Findings

This study reveals significant insights into HBCUs' role in shaping global leadership and influencing U.S. diplomacy. Through an in-depth analysis of seven HBCU alumni, the research emphasizes how the principles of critical pedagogy embedded in HBCU curricula have empowered graduates to challenge systemic oppression and contribute meaningfully to international relations. The findings demonstrate that HBCUs cultivate diplomats and global leaders who navigate complex diplomatic landscapes. Moreover, the study underscores the diverse pathways through which HBCU graduates engage with global challenges, from diplomacy and politics to science and humanitarian work, thus illustrating the impact of their education.

Dr. David Satcher

Dr. David Satcher is a physician-scientist and public health administrator who has made significant contributions to healthcare and health equity. He graduated from Morehouse College in 1963. Dr. Satcher's career is marked by groundbreaking achievements in public health leadership. He became the first African American director of the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) in 1993 and went on to serve as the 16th Surgeon General of the United States from 1998 to 2002, becoming the first African American to hold that position. At the same time, he served as the 10th Assistant Secretary for Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, making him the only person in U.S. history to hold both positions concurrently. Throughout his career, Dr. Satcher has held prominent roles in academic medicine, including leadership positions at the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Meharry Medical College. His work has focused on addressing major health disparities and public health issues, such as HIV/AIDS, mental health, immunizations, smoking, and obesity. As Surgeon General, Dr. Satcher tackled many of the nation's pressing health challenges and worked to reduce health inequities, particularly in underserved communities (Kennedy-Satcher Center for Mental Health Equity, n.d.).

In 2006, Dr. Satcher founded the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine, where he continues to serve as the director and senior advisor. The Institute is dedicated to training diverse leaders who can address health disparities and influence healthcare policy, particularly in marginalized communities. Dr. Satcher remains an active advocate for health equity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities (Meharry Medical College School of Global Health, n.d.).

Dr. Satcher has received numerous accolades throughout his career, including over 50 honorary degrees, and has been honored with many awards from various organizations. Even after retiring from public service, he continues to promote health equality and mentor the next generation of healthcare leaders. His lifelong commitment to public health and his work in addressing racial disparities in healthcare have left an indelible mark on the field (Kennedy-Satcher Center for Mental Health Equity, n.d.).

Dr. Ruth Simmons

Dr. Ruth J. Simmons earned her Bachelor of Arts in French from Dillard University in 1967. In 1995, Dr. Simmons made history when she became president of Smith College, the first African American woman to head a major college or university. At Smith, she introduced groundbreaking initiatives, such as the college's first engineering program. In 2001, she achieved another milestone, becoming the first African American woman to lead an Ivy League institution when she was appointed president of Brown University. During her tenure, she raised significant

funding for the university and established need-blind admissions for undergraduates. Her career also included board positions at Goldman Sachs, Texas Instruments, and Pfizer, as well as involvement with the Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholars Foundation. Her contributions to higher education and leadership have earned her numerous honors, including over thirty honorary degrees, the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal, and the Ellis Island Medal of Honor (The History Makers, 2019).

Her journey from poverty to becoming a groundbreaking academic leader is a testament to her resilience, dedication to education, and commitment to breaking down barriers for future generations. Throughout her career, Dr. Simmons has emphasized the importance of access to education, the advancement of women in traditionally male-dominated fields, and the need for diversity and inclusion in higher education (The History Makers, 2019).

James Madison Nabrit, Jr.

James Madison Nabrit, Jr. was a distinguished civil rights lawyer, leader, and academic, known for his pivotal contributions to U.S. civil rights law and international diplomacy. A graduate of Morehouse College in 1923, Nabrit embarked on a career that bridged legal advocacy and academia. He joined the Howard University Law School faculty in 1936, where he established the nation's first formal civil rights law course. His legal career was marked by his work on landmark civil rights cases such as *Lane v. Wilson* (1939), *Terry v. Adams* (1953), and the pivotal *Bolling v. Sharpe* (1952), which laid the groundwork for the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Burnett, 2007). In 1958, Nabrit became the Dean of Howard University School of Law, a role he held until 1960, before ascending to the presidency of the university from 1960 to 1965 and again from 1968-1969. During his tenure, he continued his legal advocacy and worked alongside key figures in civil rights law, including Thurgood Marshall and Charles Hamilton Houston. In 1966, Nabrit's commitment to public service led to his appointment by President Lyndon B. Johnson as the U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, where he represented the United States on the international stage (Burnett, 2007). Nabrit's legacy as a champion of justice, equality, and civil rights, combined with his leadership at Howard University, solidified his place as a trailblazer in both the legal field and in shaping U.S. diplomacy. His work in promoting African American representation in legal education, civil rights, and diplomacy continues to inspire generations of leaders (Howard University, n.d.).

Ambassador Edward R. Dudley

Ambassador Edward Richard Dudley was a pioneering figure in U.S. diplomacy and a civil rights advocate. He graduated in 1932 with a Bachelor of Science degree from Johnson C. Smith University, where his education laid the foundation for his significant impact in both legal and political spheres. Dudley began his legal career in the New York Attorney General's Office, serving as an assistant attorney general. His exceptional work attracted the attention of Thurgood Marshall, who appointed him as a Special Assistant at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1943. In this role, Dudley contributed to drafting legal briefs and advancing cases aimed at dismantling racial segregation in public transportation and education, securing equitable pay for Black teachers, and advocating for the admission of Black students to Southern colleges (McLellan, 2015).

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman appointed Dudley as U.S. Envoy and Minister to Liberia. Following the elevation of Liberia's diplomatic mission to a full U.S. Embassy in 1949, Dudley became the first African American to be appointed U.S. Ambassador. His tenure, from 1949 to 1953, was marked by efforts to strengthen U.S.-Liberian relations and promote commercial ties. Dudley also advocated for African-American Foreign Service officers, addressing the discriminatory practice that confined them to assignments in Africa, known as the "negro circuit" (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2020). His advocacy, grounded in the principles of critical pedagogy, underscored his commitment to social justice and equality. Dudley's efforts helped ensure that African-American diplomats could serve in diverse postings around the world, thus expanding Black representation within U.S. diplomatic circles (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2020).

Ambassador Patricia Roberts Harris

Ambassador Patricia Roberts Harris earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Economics from Howard University in 1945, graduating summa cum laude (Historic America, 2021). While at Howard, Harris was an active member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority and served as Vice Chairman of the Howard University chapter of the NAACP, experiences that set the stage for her future in diplomacy and public service (Historic America, n.d.).

Harris began her diplomatic career in 1965 when President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed her as the U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg, marking a historic achievement as the first African-American woman to hold such a position (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2020). During her tenure, she focused on strengthening U.S.-Luxembourg relations and promoting

diversity within the U.S. Foreign Service. Harris's work as Ambassador included representing American interests abroad, fostering international cooperation, and advancing diplomatic initiatives that supported the United States' global priorities. Additionally, she served as an alternate delegate to the United Nations General Assembly from 1966 to 1968, engaging in critical discussions related to international peace, security, human rights, and development. This role broadened her perspective on global issues, enriching her contributions to U.S. foreign policy and domestic governance (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2020).

Harris's impact extended beyond diplomacy, as she broke significant barriers in legal education. She became the first African-American woman to serve as the Dean of a U.S. law school, at Howard University, where she influenced the development of future legal professionals. Her leadership in legal education left a lasting legacy, shaping the careers of numerous lawyers and diplomats (Historic America, 2021).

Her influence further expanded when she held multiple cabinet positions under President Jimmy Carter. From 1977 to 1979, she served as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and from 1979 to 1981, she was the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2020). In these roles, she championed key initiatives aimed at improving access to affordable housing, healthcare, and social services. At HUD, her work focused on addressing urban poverty and combating housing discrimination, while at HHS, she emphasized equitable healthcare access and the expansion of social welfare programs (Historic America, 2021).

Ambassador Pamela A. Bridgewater

Ambassador Pamela A. Bridgewater earned a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Virginia State University (VSU) in 1968, where she developed critical knowledge and skills that laid the foundation for her career in diplomacy. VSU's political science curriculum, designed to sharpen students' critical thinking, writing, public speaking, and quantitative research abilities, equipped Bridgewater with the tools necessary to navigate complex international issues (Virginia State University, n.d.). She has made lasting contributions to U.S. foreign policy, particularly through her diplomatic work in Africa and the Caribbean.

As the first African-American woman to serve as the principal officer in Durban, South Africa, during the country's transition from apartheid, Ambassador Bridgewater played a pivotal role in establishing trust with key figures such as Nelson Mandela and members of the African

National Congress (ANC). Her diplomatic efforts were integral to the U.S. government's ability to engage effectively in South Africa's evolving political landscape. Additionally, during the Liberian Civil War, Bridgewater was appointed Special Coordinator for Peace, where her leadership was instrumental in negotiating a comprehensive peace agreement and the establishment of democratic elections in Liberia (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

In her capacity as U.S. Ambassador to Benin, Ghana, and Jamaica, Bridgewater strengthened diplomatic relations and promoted international cooperation. In Ghana, she oversaw initiatives aimed at advancing governance, economic development, and security, while bolstering U.S. influence in the Caribbean and Africa. Furthermore, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Bridgewater managed U.S. relationships with 16 West African nations, tackling critical issues such as governance, security, and economic development. Her strategic leadership and diplomatic expertise significantly advanced U.S. foreign policy priorities in the region (American Academy of Diplomacy, 2022).

Dr. Felicia Davis

Dr. Felicia Davis is a leader in U.S. foreign policy and international affairs, recognized for her significant contributions to climate advocacy and sustainability. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Spelman College in 1966, where she developed a foundational understanding of political systems, governance, and public policy. In 2016, Dr. Davis co-founded the HBCU Green Fund, an initiative focused on financing sustainable building projects at HBCUs. This initiative has played a transformative role in advancing sustainability within these institutions by prioritizing energy consumption reduction, increasing renewable energy use, and promoting environmental education. HBCUs serve as vital centers for sustainability, driving social, economic, and environmental justice in their communities (HBCU Green Fund, n.d.). Under Dr. Davis's leadership, the Fund has cultivated an extensive network of environmental justice advocates, including faculty, professionals, and students. This network has been pivotal in advancing numerous projects that create resilient, sustainable campuses at HBCUs, such as energy-efficient retrofits and the installation of renewable energy systems. These efforts have significantly reduced greenhouse gas emissions and decreased operational costs for these institutions (Davis, 2010). One of the Fund's notable achievements under Dr. Davis's leadership was the establishment of its Africa office in Senegal, announced at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai. This expansion represents a major step

in extending the scope of the Fund's advocacy, enabling it to support sustainability projects across Africa and strengthen international collaborations on climate justice (AFRO, 2024).

Beyond her work with the HBCU Green Fund, Dr. Davis has contributed to various initiatives in climate justice. She serves on several steering committees, including the Intentional Endowments Network, the UNCF Institute for Capacity Building Climate Action Advisory Board, and the JustTransition PowerForce. In these roles, she has advocated for tangible reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through strategies such as energy efficiency retrofits, green building practices, and renewable energy solutions (Intentional Endowments Network, n.d.).

Dr. Davis has also authored influential reports and articles on climate justice and sustainability, such as the groundbreaking *Air of Injustice* report and the *Minority Serving Institutions-Green Report* (Davis, 2010). Her research and publications have significantly shaped policies and practices aimed at advancing environmental justice.

Discussion

HBCUs have long served as incubators for transformative education that emphasizes critical thinking, social equity, and active engagement in challenging societal injustices. HBCUs fostered an environment that encouraged students to critically engage with issues of racial and social inequity, empowering them to become advocates for change. Through a curriculum that prioritized activism and intellectual rigor, these institutions equipped future leaders with the tools to address both systemic oppression and global challenges. This section explores how the HBCU educational experience, shaped by critical pedagogy, influenced the careers of seven leaders in U.S. diplomacy, civil rights, and social justice.

Dr. David Satcher

Dr. David Satcher's career in public health and healthcare leadership was profoundly influenced by his educational experience at Morehouse College, an institution renowned for its commitment to social justice and producing leaders in various fields. At Morehouse, Dr. Satcher's education emphasized the importance of critical thinking and community service — principles that align with critical pedagogy's focus on challenging existing societal structures and fostering leadership for social change. The values instilled at Morehouse helped shape his approach to public health, where he consistently addressed systemic inequities and health disparities, particularly those affecting marginalized communities.

Dr. Satcher's groundbreaking roles, including becoming the first African American director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the first African American U.S. Surgeon General, were driven by his deep commitment to the principles of equity and justice learned during his academic career. The experiences at Morehouse equipped him with both the intellectual tools and moral compass to confront public health crises and advocate for policies that prioritized vulnerable populations. His leadership in addressing health disparities in areas such as HIV/AIDS, mental health, and obesity highlights how critical pedagogy in his formative years shaped his drive to integrate social justice into healthcare practice.

Furthermore, Dr. Satcher's founding of the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine reflects his ongoing commitment to creating pathways for diverse healthcare leaders, ensuring that the next generation of professionals is equipped to combat health disparities. His work exemplifies the enduring impact of critical pedagogy—by emphasizing empowerment and social responsibility, Dr. Satcher's career has not only advanced public health but also set the stage for future leaders to challenge inequities in healthcare. Through his leadership, Dr. Satcher continues to influence public health policy and advocate for health equity, guided by the same principles that were reinforced during his time at Morehouse.

Dr. Ruth Simmons

Dr. Ruth J. Simmons's transformative career as an academic leader and advocate for diversity and inclusion in higher education was deeply shaped by her experiences as a student, particularly at Dillard University, a historically Black college. At Dillard, her education was grounded in critical pedagogy, which emphasized the importance of challenging societal norms and promoting social justice. The institution's focus on empowering students from marginalized backgrounds provided her with the intellectual and moral foundation that guided her throughout her career. Her exposure to critical thinking, social justice, and leadership in an academic environment centered on equality allowed her to engage with educational barriers in ways that would later influence her groundbreaking work in higher education administration.

Dr. Simmons's rise to the presidency of Smith College in 1995 and Brown University in 2001—becoming the first African American woman to lead both institutions — reflects her commitment to education as a tool for social change. The critical pedagogy she experienced at Dillard instilled in her a deep understanding of the importance of access to higher education, especially for underrepresented groups. Dr. Simmons's groundbreaking initiatives, such as

establishing the first engineering program at Smith College and advocating for need-blind admissions at Brown University, highlight how her foundational educational experiences at an HBCU empowered her to dismantle barriers in higher education and pave the way for future generations of diverse scholars.

Moreover, her leadership in academic administration exemplifies how critical pedagogy can shape an individual's ability to challenge institutional norms and advocate for systemic change. Dr. Simmons's work on diversity and inclusion, particularly in raising funds to increase access to higher education for underrepresented students, is an extension of the values she learned at Dillard, where she was encouraged to engage critically with social structures. Through her legacy, Dr. Simmons continues to influence the academic landscape, emphasizing that education is a powerful tool in promoting equity and social justice.

James Madison Nabrit, Jr.

James Madison Nabrit, Jr.'s contributions to civil rights law and international diplomacy were deeply shaped by the critical education he received at Morehouse College and Northwestern University School of Law. At Morehouse, Nabrit gained foundational knowledge in political systems and public service, preparing him for a career that would bridge the legal and diplomatic fields. The rigorous intellectual environment at Morehouse encouraged critical thinking and the questioning of societal norms, which would later influence Nabrit's advocacy for racial justice and equality.

Nabrit's time at Howard University Law School, where he became a faculty member in 1936, further solidified his commitment to social change. There, he introduced the nation's first formal civil rights law course, reinforcing his belief in using legal education as a tool for combating racial discrimination. The critical pedagogy emphasized at Howard, which encouraged students to engage with and challenge societal inequalities, resonated with Nabrit's values. His involvement in landmark civil rights cases such as *Lane v. Wilson* (1939), *Terry v. Adams* (1953), and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (1952) was driven by the educational foundation he received at Howard, where his understanding of law as a vehicle for social justice was continuously nurtured.

As Dean of Howard Law School and later the president of the university, Nabrit continued to apply these principles in his work. His leadership at Howard underscored the importance of providing African Americans with opportunities for higher education and legal

expertise, ensuring that future generations could continue the work of dismantling systemic racism. Nabrit's appointment as U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations in 1966 marked a new chapter in his career, where he utilized his legal and diplomatic skills to represent the U.S. internationally. His legacy exemplifies the impact of critical pedagogy in shaping leaders committed to justice and equality, both within the U.S. legal system and on the global stage.

Ambassador Edward R. Dudley

Critical pedagogy, which emphasizes education as a transformative tool for social justice, played a foundational role in shaping Ambassador Edward Richard Dudley's career. His educational experience at Johnson C. Smith University was not merely an academic pursuit but a formative journey in the development of his commitment to racial equality, justice, and civil rights. HBCUs like Johnson C. Smith, through their curricula and educational philosophies, were vital spaces for fostering critical consciousness among African-American students during the early 20th century.

At Johnson C. Smith University, Dudley encountered a form of education that not only equipped him with knowledge of legal and political systems but also fostered an understanding of the importance of education in challenging the status quo. This is reflective of the core tenets of critical pedagogy, which stresses the importance of education in questioning oppressive structures. His Bachelor of Science degree in political science laid the intellectual groundwork for his future work in law and diplomacy, but it was the critical approach to learning, one grounded in an understanding of race and systemic oppression, that would guide his later efforts.

Dudley's work at the NAACP further illustrates the influence of critical pedagogy in shaping his career. His involvement in challenging racial segregation in public transportation and education, advocating for equitable pay for Black teachers, and pushing for the admission of Black students to Southern colleges was rooted in an educational framework that sought not just to educate but to instigate change. As a Special Assistant at the NAACP, Dudley was tasked with using his legal expertise to dismantle systems of segregation. His ability to navigate and challenge these systems was directly informed by the critical, justice-oriented education he received at Johnson C. Smith, which encouraged him to view legal structures not as neutral systems but as tools of power that could be reformed for social good.

In his diplomatic career, particularly as U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Dudley continued to operate from this pedagogical grounding. His advocacy for African-American Foreign Service

officers, pushing for their inclusion in diplomatic postings beyond the African continent, exemplified the practical application of critical pedagogy. The "negro circuit," a discriminatory practice that restricted African-American diplomats to assignments in Africa, was an unjust barrier that Dudley actively sought to dismantle. His efforts were not just about representation but about advocating for a more just and equitable global diplomatic landscape. Through his work, Dudley embodied the principles of critical pedagogy by challenging systemic inequality within the U.S. Foreign Service, much like how critical pedagogy challenges the traditional paradigms of knowledge, power, and authority.

Dudley's critical pedagogy experience at Johnson C. Smith University can thus be understood as the catalyst for his life's work in both the legal and diplomatic spheres. His education encouraged him to view the world through a lens of social justice, shaping his commitment to fighting racial inequality both at home and abroad.

Ambassador Patricia Roberts Harris

Critical pedagogy at Howard University played a pivotal role in shaping Ambassador Patricia Roberts Harris's career and commitment to social justice and equality. At Howard, Harris was immersed in an educational environment that valued the intersection of intellectual rigor and activism. Her involvement in the NAACP chapter and Delta Sigma Theta sorority exemplified Howard's emphasis on leadership development and civic engagement. These experiences were integral in shaping her sense of responsibility to advocate for racial and social equity, which would later inform her groundbreaking work in diplomacy, legal education, and public service. Howard's curriculum, which combined political science and economics, provided her with the critical analytical skills necessary to navigate and challenge systems of oppression, while her engagement in social organizations fostered a deep understanding of the need for institutional reform. Harris's tenure as Ambassador to Luxembourg and her work at the United Nations reflected this foundation, as she consistently pushed for greater diversity and inclusion within the U.S. Foreign Service and advocated for international human rights. Furthermore, her transformative leadership in legal education as the first African-American woman Dean of a U.S. law school, coupled with her role in the Carter administration, demonstrated how her education at Howard enabled her to break barriers and champion policies aimed at reducing social inequities in housing, healthcare, and urban development. Through critical pedagogy, Howard University not only prepared Harris to excel in her career but also instilled in her an unwavering

commitment to advancing social justice and human dignity in both domestic and international contexts.

Ambassador Pamela A. Bridgewater

Ambassador Pamela A. Bridgewater's diplomatic career exemplifies the impact of critical pedagogy cultivated during her time at Virginia State University (VSU). The institution's political science curriculum, which emphasized critical thinking, public speaking, and research skills, played a foundational role in shaping Bridgewater's approach to international diplomacy. At VSU, she was not only equipped with the analytical tools necessary to navigate the complexities of global affairs but also encouraged to challenge existing paradigms and consider the broader socio-political contexts of her work. This pedagogical framework fostered a mindset that allowed her to successfully contribute to significant diplomatic milestones throughout her career.

As the first African-American woman to serve as the principal officer in Durban, South Africa, Bridgewater's ability to build trust with influential figures like Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress was influenced by the skills she developed in critical discourse and relationship-building at VSU. Her leadership during the Liberian Civil War, where she helped negotiate peace and facilitate democratic elections, further demonstrated the practical application of her VSU education. Bridgewater's subsequent roles as U.S. Ambassador to Benin, Ghana, and Jamaica, and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, reflect her adeptness in addressing complex issues of governance, security, and economic development — skills honed through the critical pedagogical principles she experienced at VSU.

Dr. Felicia Davis

Dr. Felicia Davis's leadership in climate advocacy and sustainability is deeply rooted in the critical education she received at Spelman College. After earning her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1966, Davis benefitted from Spelman's curriculum, which emphasized critical thinking, research methods, and the understanding of political systems. Courses like International Relations, Comparative Political Systems, and American Constitutional Law provided a comprehensive foundation for her future work in public policy and international affairs. The program encouraged students to think critically about political issues and emphasized the importance of challenging societal structures, preparing Davis to take an active role in addressing environmental and social justice.

Spelman College's integration of critical pedagogy influenced Davis's professional trajectory. Her education at Spelman instilled in her the values of social justice and the responsibility to challenge existing inequities, which she later embodied in her work with the HBCU Green Fund. By co-founding the Green Fund in 2016, Davis sought to advance sustainability at HBCUs, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and environmental education. Her approach to environmental justice, which empowers marginalized communities, mirrors the critical thinking and activism she cultivated at Spelman.

Davis's ability to integrate the principles of critical pedagogy into her leadership—evident in the establishment of the Fund's Africa office and her role in global climate initiatives—demonstrates the lasting impact of her Spelman education. Through her advocacy, Dr. Davis exemplifies how critical pedagogy can shape leaders who drive systemic change in both education and environmental justice.

Limitations

This research faced several limitations that may have affected the scope and interpretation of the findings. One key limitation was limited access to comprehensive biographical data. Many HBCU diplomats have documented careers, but lesser-known diplomats, especially those in less visible roles or regions with limited U.S. media coverage, often have less accessible information. This gap in data restricts the ability to fully assess the contributions of HBCU graduates to U.S. foreign policy. Additionally, there was a geographical bias in the existing literature, with a focus on Africa and the Caribbean. This focus leaves a gap in understanding the contributions of HBCU-trained diplomats in regions such as Asia, Latin America, or Europe, potentially skewing the findings. Another limitation was the underrepresentation of contemporary diplomats. Most of the available research examines diplomats from earlier decades. This leaves the contributions of more recent diplomats and global leaders less explored in the analysis. Finally, evaluating the quantifiable diplomatic impact of individuals remains challenging. The complex and nuanced nature of diplomatic work makes it difficult to isolate the direct influence of specific diplomats on broader geopolitical outcomes, policy shifts, or international negotiations, as their work is often intertwined with larger diplomatic teams and international institutions.

Conclusion

In sum, this research has illuminated the significant yet underexplored role that HBCUs play in shaping global leaders and advancing U.S. diplomacy through critical pedagogy. By examining the educational experiences of seven global leaders, the study demonstrates how HBCUs, grounded in social justice principles, produce diplomats and leaders who challenge systemic oppression and contribute to international change. The integration of critical pedagogy within HBCU curricula fosters a deep commitment to global citizenship and equips graduates with the analytical skills necessary to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes and advocate for social justice.

Through this investigation, the research highlighted the transformative power of HBCUs in shaping both domestic and international leadership. While the study focused on the educational foundations that contributed to the careers of these seven leaders, it also underscores the broader implications of HBCU pedagogy for future generations. The findings suggest that an education rooted in social justice, diversity, and global engagement is essential in preparing leaders who are equipped to address contemporary diplomatic challenges and reshape the future of U.S. foreign policy.

The limitations of this study, including gaps in available biographical data, geographical biases, and the challenges of quantifying individual diplomatic impact, offer avenues for future research. Further exploration into the current contributions of HBCU graduates to global diplomacy and the continued impact of critical pedagogy in higher education is necessary to fully understand the enduring legacy of these institutions in shaping international relations.

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