



Reflections Before the COP21 Experience
HBCU Students on the Road to Paris

This document is a sampling of the Pre-Conference Reflections of 36 HBCU students who will be traveling to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties 21st Convening (COP21) in Paris, France November 30, 2015 through December 13, 2015.



Hello, my name is **Tiara D. Gray** and I am currently a sophomore at Dillard University located in New Orleans, Louisiana. I was born in Stillwater, Oklahoma, but I was raised in Dallas, Texas. Since a young age, it has always been my dream to make a difference in this world. I have always longed to be a doctor and dedicate my life to helping others. Recently, I discovered that I wanted to be a pediatric neurologist. In the fall of 2013, I began getting unbearable migraines and to this day, I still don't have a proper diagnosis. I believe that I suffer from these headaches due to the environment and because of this I want to help children that suffer from neurological problems. Currently, I am involved in various clubs and organizations on campus including but not limited to, The Biology Club, The Pre-Med Club, The English Club, The National Society of Leadership and Success, and The Environmental Justice Club. I also enjoy giving back and serving my community in any way that I possibly can.

My short-term goals are to obtain my phlebotomy license, graduate from Dillard University with honors, graduate prior to May 2018, and to continue to build my career in undergraduate research. My long-term goals include going to graduate school and medical school and opening my own practice specializing in pediatrics; more specifically, neurology. It has also been my dream to travel the world and raise awareness for neurological problems in children.

It is very important for me to be able to attend the COP 21 conference to raise awareness about the negative impact that the environment has on our communities and that of people of color. I look forward to working with other students and also gaining an international perspective on the environment and the negative effects that it has around the world. I hope that attending the COP 21 conference in Paris, France will serve as a platform to further expand my horizons during my undergraduate education. I look forward to working with my peers and serving our communities through shared ideas and collaborations to assist in enhancing the environment.

My name is **Faith Cecilia Flugence** and I am a sophomore at Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. I am majoring in criminal justice, and minoring in English, all in an effort to reach my life-long dream of becoming a criminal defense attorney. I chose to attend Dillard University not only because it is a private, historically black liberal arts college, but because of its long legacy of nurturing and molding several innovative self-driven strong young men and women. In being apart of this divine institute, I intend to prestigiously obtain a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and later attend Yale University for law school in an effort set forth and pursue my goal of changing the world through the justice system .

I was born in Lafayette, Louisiana and raised in Broussard, Louisiana, which is an ideally small town. Being reared in such a small environment has made me an extremely family oriented individual. I was reared by both of my parents under one roof, which I feel has made me an indubitably strong young woman. My parents have always instilled in me independence, self-motivation, and ambition. I am beyond blessed to say that I have two parents that have always supported me in anything and everything I went through both willingly and unwillingly. Having such great people backing me up so consistently and so profoundly has played a tremendous part in my focus on and capability of reaching success.

I am honored to be selected as a student delegate at the Paris 2015 COP21 conference. In attending this conference I hope not only to become more informed on the issues of environmental injustices faced by African Americans around the United States every day, but also to learn ways in which I can bring change and help serve justice to all of the individuals that are affected by this extremely controversial issue.

My name is **Simone English**, a doctoral candidate of Florida A&M University School of the Environment, with a concentration in Environmental Science, Policy and Risk

Management. I hail from the parish and city of Kingston and St. Andrew, Jamaica. My extra-curricular activities include reading, organizing, team and community building, volunteering, composting, recycling and sustainable projects, designing, construction, sports, farming, traveling, and participating in music, art and cultural activities. I am a current volunteer and intern with the newly created FAMU Sustainability Institute working on a number of initiatives.

My passion dwells in working with communities to realize our potential in becoming independent, empowered and resilient, and finding ways to make these goals possible. To help enact policies that can reduce inequalities and injustices, and lessen the burden and negative impacts on those already vulnerable and at high risks.

Our current climate and how we approach and interact with it are very important in determining our future. The way we treat our environment impacts us, and notably, those that will be most negatively impacted are the groups that are contributing the least to the destruction of the environment. Therefore, my career goal is being able and equipped to translate the science and policy in a manner as simple and understandable as possible to the relevant audience – those who create policies and, most importantly those who must adapt for survival. Having the ability and opportunity to work across and beyond borders with groups who would not normally be found attending conferences, summits and seminars, but are found in the communities – in schools, places of worship, centers, workshops etc., to help them communicate their needs and desires, while assisting with the plans necessary to achieve what is best for them. With a background in architecture and construction, I desire to work in building resilient communities where the built environment respects the natural environment, people’s health and livelihoods are paramount, climate and environmental justice/injustice do not determine one’s future status, food security/insecurity will not be overbearing to the point of malnutrition and starvation, and people’s income level, race and culture do not determine whether or not they have access to healthy air, water, land and food. Attending COP21 would provide collaboration opportunities, inspiration through the accomplishment of others, reassurance that this work is necessary, and the determination to carry on with the long, heavy, troublesome, controversial but important work ahead if we are to close gaps.



MOREHOUSE
COLLEGE

Kaylon Paterson Ever since childhood, I have been very much concerned about the way mankind has abused our planet. From an early age, I spent my time watching documentaries detailing the effects of pollution and the potential for these effects to become worse. As I moved through the school system in my home country of Trinidad and Tobago, my concerns were fueled even more, as I

focused my attention on such subjects as Biology, Chemistry, Geography and Physics. I became interested in current methods of pollution management and thus spent my remaining year of high school as an environmental science focus.

Upon enrolling into Morehouse College, I began to pursue a bachelor’s of science in Physics which I have maintained for the last three years. My goal is to eventually obtain my PhD in physics and continue in the area of research, where my focus will be energy, matter and space/time theory.

I have spent my college summers doing research in alternative energy sources, starting at freshman year where I worked at Johnson Battery Tech’s Excellatron research lab. While there, I assisted in the development of their solid-state battery, attempting to improve its efficiency and lifespan. My sophomore year summer I returned home where I worked for the national science center, teaching children aged 5-12 the basics of space travel, flight dynamics, cosmology and astrology.

In my junior year, I began to do research in the area of biofuels as a member of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. The goal of our research is to find an efficient, non-food based crop to effectively replace corn as a major source of ethanol. This multifaceted research has extended into the summer where I continue to work under the guidance of mentors spanning the Chemistry, Biology and Psychology departments.

Over my college career, I was driven to start an environmental management organization, which truly manifested in my junior year. The organization, known as Amicus Terrae, is focused on research and development in the areas of sustainable technology and pollution management. We have spent the past year doing community outreach and clean ups in the Atlanta area and have begun to develop urban gardens or green spaces in such places as Spelman College and B.E.S.T Academy (high school).

My passion for the environment has led me to want to attend the COP 21 conference as I feel there is a lot more to be learnt regarding environmental policy. I hope to gain new ideas and perspectives on my work and even raise awareness about my organization.



My name is **Jaleyah Davis**. I am a senior psychology major at Southern University and A&M College. I am Caribbean-American, my family hails from Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, and Antigua while I was born in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. I spent nine years in the DC, Maryland, Virginia Metropolitan area and five years living in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. While at Southern University, I have been the Manager of the Southern

University Volleyball team, Opinion Writer and Copy Editor for the Southern University Newspaper, writer for the Southern University Magazine, writer for the Yearbook, Volunteer Coordinator for the Association for Women Students, Head of Education for NAACP, Head of PR/Media Relations for the Psychology Club, member of Southern University's Women's Flag Football team, and a Popular Opinion Leader for the Think Smart/Be S.A.F.E. initiative. I enjoy playing sports, writing, cooking, traveling, learning new things, mentoring, and being around people I love. I aspire to attend graduate school in order to obtain a doctoral degree in Social Psychology. My career goals are to become a licensed psychologist with established research, establish psychological health practice, become an author, write for publications like *Psychology Today*, develop after school programs for kids, give presentations nationally, and be in a position to give back to the community.

It is important to attend the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference because the negotiations that take place there have a social and economic effect on every country in numerous ways. It is vital to understand the relationship between society and the earth. When fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) burn, they release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere causing the layer of greenhouse gases to thicken consequently making the Earth warmer. Being able to recognize and understand the varying concepts of climate change allows us to be able to strategize on how to decrease the amount of fossil fuels that are released into the atmosphere and in essence predict probable weather outcomes for the future as well as how to adapt to them.



Hello my name is **Shiranthi Goonathilaka**. I am a Senior Biology major at Spelman College with hopes to become a pediatrician that uses environmental health practices in my everyday work. Recognizing the need for my generation, specifically youth of color, to drive the social change our world desperately needs, I dedicate the majority of time to my informal mentorship foundation, Because I am, I shall. (B.I.A.S.), whose aim is to cultivate future generations through holistic and meaningful mentorship around social awareness and self-actualization.

I am a Minnesota native and have been fortunate to have rich roots in community organizing and informal STEAM education. My long term plan is to be able to merge my educational path of

becoming a pediatrician, goal of building a community healthcare center and my Foundation to become a force for social, educational, economic and healthcare reformation.

I have been fortunate to have many opportunities to engage in environmental work through the science museum of MN. I was recognized as a Young Futurist in the online magazine *The Root* for my work using Informal STEM education as an outlet for Green Innovation. From that recognition I was invited to the White House for the 2014 Champions of Change honoree event. Last summer I served as the first Environmental Justice intern at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. I worked to create a retrofitted EJ plan for the state of Minnesota that focuses on equity, transparency and enhanced community outreach.

Being able to be one of the many HBCU Student representatives at COP 21 will help to reaffirm to our institutions, as well as minority communities, that Climate Change is an issue that greatly affects us and that we need to stay on top of. I also believe it will be our responsibility to ask those tough questions of our representatives to not only make commitments to alleviate environmental disparities but also to make sure they follow through will the implementation of such commitments.



**TENNESSEE
STATE UNIVERSITY**

Lauren Wiggins As an Atlanta native and Tennessee State University senior, my journey to environmentalism was a unique one involving an abrupt change in passion, desires, and impact. In the fall of 2013, I attended Towson University in Maryland, by way of the National Student Exchange Program, while majoring in Health Science (concentrating in Public Health) and minoring in International Affairs. This experience at Towson enhanced my interest in the environment and provided a gateway to opportunities for advocacy. Towson's environmental organization gave me the opportunity to attend the 2013 Powershift Conference in Pittsburgh, which is a national conference for thousands of young environmental advocates. The networking events at Powershift led to an internship at Greenpeace USA in Washington, D.C., where I became a published writer for an article on Human Rights Abuses in the Seafood Supply Chain. My current internship at the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation, in New Hampshire, allows me to research people's perceptions of natural resources and the intrinsic value tied to their inquiry of ecological processes and willingness to engage in environmental stewardship.

While my 5th year at TSU is mainly in preparation for Yale University's joint environmental management and business administration program, Green Corps, a program for young professionals interested environmental campaign organizing, is a viable choice for the one-year delay of graduate school enrollment. In recognition of the process and techniques for environmental advocacy, a comprehensive understanding of both national and international policy decisions are paramount, as is an understanding of the nuanced views toward environmental conservation in various regions around the world. With that being said, the importance of attending COP21 would further my understanding of the United Nations processes, as well as open my mind to other regions of the world, as this would be my first time out of the U.S. This experience is not only important to me, but the entire world-view that can be shifted by recognition of young, black-Americans who are often not a part of the climate change conversation.

My hobbies and passion intertwine, as I can often be found reading books on economics, policy, history and how each subject correlates to the betterment of the environment. Moreover, my involvement with non-profit organizations and human dimensions of environmental research are frequent digressions from school work in Health Science. In retrospect, my goal is to become a sustainability officer/director at institutions and corporations, and eventually begin a consulting company that is culturally responsive in promoting sustainable habits among people as well as environmentally/socially responsible systems among businesses.



Steven C. Washington is a Masters candidate in the Urban Planning and Environmental Policy program at Texas Southern University. He is also a Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland Scholar and an Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)

Fellow for 2015. His research include: Port sustainability, environmental planning, goods movement, environmental policy, community engagement, and capacity building. He received his B.S. degree in Chemistry from Texas Southern University in 2009. His career interest is becoming a planner within a port authority, focusing on environmental stewardship, sustainable supply chain management and economic development with port communities. In his free time, Steven enjoys fishing, reading and watching sports.

Attending COP 21 in Paris is important to me because, it gives me the opportunity of networking and collaborating with young leaders of tomorrow. This conference also allows me the chance to raise the visibility of environmental justice communities in the City of Houston impacted by goods movement. As a native Houstonian, I have a vested interest in improving the quality of life for my city and the State of Texas. In the future, I would like to be a planner within a port authority, developing, implementing and measuring Environmental Management Systems (EMS) to address port sustainability. As container ship traffic increases in the United States, it is vital that we begin to examine climate resilient supply chains. This is a global issue, which city governments and port authorities must include in strategic and master planning. As an emerging leader, I hope that I can contribute to the maritime and planning fields in the areas of environmental policy, community engagement, public health and safety, as well as economic development. COP 21 in Paris, builds on the momentum established by the HBCU Climate Consortium, at the People's Climate Change march in New York City. Having an HBCU delegation in Paris is imperative, to demonstrating the role of communities of color in climate change, environmental stewardship and awareness.

My name is **Joy Semien**, I was born in Houston, Texas but I grew up in Geismar, Louisiana also known as Cancer Alley. My hobbies include reading, traveling, and hanging out with my friends. I am a recent graduate of Dillard University holding a bachelor's of science degree in biology and a minor in chemistry. While at Dillard I was extremely active on and off campus. I served as the class of 2015 vice president, a Louis-LAMP research scholar studying key environmental issues, and I worked part time at the Orleans parish school board. At Dillard University I studied domestically and abroad conducting both qualitative/quantitative researches within aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. I had the opportunity to spend a semester in Woods Hole, Ma assessing impacts of global climate change on Plum Island Estuary Salt Marsh. I traveled abroad to Kingston Jamaica where I studied the value of cultural diversity between Jamaica and the United States and I traveled to Gabon, Africa where I compared primate diversity and vegetation abundance within continuous and gallery forest habitats within Lope National Park. All of these unique experiences provided me with ample opportunities to gain background in the study of sociology, climate change, and ecological conservation.

I am a first year master's student at Texas Southern University in the urban planning and environmental policy department. I desire to have a career centered on community involvement that will allow me to conduct research, educate, and alter international/national policies. I am aspiring to become a coastal resource manager with ambitions of understanding the effects of anthropologic and natural disturbances on coastal ecosystems that relate to wetland degradation and restoration.

The COP21 conference is important to me because it will open both networking and academic doors. I am elated about the opportunity to engage with so many people that have the ultimate goal of altering climate change. I believe that it is extremely important to attend the conference because it will also give students a chance to see how the system works and what needs to be changed in order to have a sustainable ecosystem to coexist. I am truly looking forward to working with everyone and engaging in such a diverse opportunity for success.