

Sankofa Students Tour Ten HBCU's on the East Coast

This summer, Merritt's Sankofa program (Umoja Community) had the opportunity to take 10 of its students to the East Coast to tour ten Historically Black Colleges & Universities. The tour was organized by the Stepping in the Right Direction Organization and paid for with Equity funding. Program Coordinator Charity Clay, who accompanied the students, chose students who had completed certain Sankofa requirements, expressed a specific interest in transferring to an HBCU, and went through an interview process.

The students participating were Jasmin Harris, CJ Hames, Ajari McCaster, Shantal Stratton, Sapphire Cain, Chioma Nwachukwu, Caleb Mahlunulu, Brandon Aninpot, Rashidat Umar, and Marjorie McNealy.

The July 18-23 trip took the students to:

- Spelman College - Atlanta Georgia
- Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama
- Morehouse College - Atlanta Georgia
- Clark Atlanta University - Atlanta Georgia
- Bennett College - Greensboro North Carolina
- North Carolina A&T State University - Greensboro NC
- St. Augustine's University – Raleigh, North Carolina
- Howard University - Washington DC
- Hampton University - Hampton, Virginia
- Norfolk State University - Norfolk, Virginia

Students were able to take tours of the campuses and speak to admissions counselors as well as current and former students. Many of the schools even allowed students to apply and be awarded conditional admission on the spot. Many of the students admitted that they had never considered an HBCU before the trip and are now considering the schools they toured as well as researching others with their desired majors.

Dr. Clay emphasized the importance of this trip to the students:

"I wanted to take students on the trip to expand their vision. Most of those students are told that HBCUs are inferior to HWIs or aren't taught about HBCUs at all. They are just pushed into the UC and CSU system. Both of those systems have great schools, but there are HBCUs that are equally great academically, and significantly better culturally for Black students in terms of the support they provide. The campus representatives wrapped themselves around the students as soon as we got there to show them that they would be supported if they chose to attend and that support was culminated when the students received ON THE SPOT ADMISSION to Norfolk State University. Even for the students who do

not choose to attend that university or any others we visited, the excitement and validation that the trip provided them has helped to make a 4-year college a reality, and I have witnessed the students being more motivated and more urgent with preparing themselves academically to make the transition from Merritt College to the university of their choice."

Students Speak Out About their Experience

"I enjoyed my experience with the college tours. I learned so much history from each university and how much substance and value they hold and their contributions to [helping students] becoming successful and ultimately leaving a legacy for people like me who aspire to get the best quality of education that exists. It gave me inspiration and assurance that getting into college is not inevitable but easily achievable if you [stop letting self doubt] take over the possibility."

—Jasmin Harris

"The best part of the college tour for me was seeing [Black] people in professions that I didn't really see growing up, and seeing them being happy. It gave me a good feeling about my future and a place in society"

—CJ Hames

"The most important part to me was having the opportunity to be physically present on campuses to meet the HBCU staff, students, and city natives. We were able to use our own agency to get our own questions answered by the people who we'd actually be involved with should we choose to go. Being in the mix was empowering and gave me control of retrieving what I wanted out of the experience."

—Ajari McCaster

"It was an amazing opportunity to get a chance to tour these historical schools and have the chance to even get accepted on the spot if you have the transferrable credits already was a wonderful experience."

—Shantal Stratton

"The most important thing to me on the trip was that I got to see real university campuses and got to learn about their backgrounds and what makes them unique. The best part was that I got what I wanted out of the trip and that was to have some knowledge on what university I could see myself at because I had no clue before."

—Sapphire Cain

"The most important part of the tour for me was being able to walk through history. We got to see where MLK's casket was, we got to walk the rounds literally built by the first students of all those universities. Being informed on the history and how those universities came to be, and being able to walk in those footsteps really inspired me. Also, it was beautiful to see Blacks rising above stereotypical standards and boundaries, and the gathering of many positive, intellectual Blacks. This experience/opportunity really motivated me to reach for higher goals and keep pushing until i attain all of them."

—**Chioma Nwachukwu**

"The trip to me was eye-opening especially for a person who wasn't interested in going to an HBCU. It really allowed me to find out what I really wanted to do with my life because I didn't know that [HBCUs] were able to offer the type of services that are equivalent to the major UCs. [I went] from a mindset that if I went to an HBCU, I didn't know if I'd be as well respected by white corporate America. I came to the realization that I have no plans of trying to please white corporate America when I graduate."

—**Caleb Mahlunghu**

"The trip was a glimpse into my future. I got to see how passionate and excited students were for their future and sure of their own success. I've never seen so many Black and brown people that fearless; that going to an HBCU would get them to their dreams due to the community of a majority Black student body. It made me a little jealous but also opened my eyes to the fact that we are all in need if it's possible and that I'm only a couple semesters away."

—**Brandon Aninipot**

"The trip was an amazing experience. It let me know that I can push myself beyond what I thought I couldn't do as far as my education. Also the history and foundation that we learned as a person and in the [Black] community made me really want to learn more about our people."

—**Rashidat Umar**

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