

RUN's Future Leaders Embrace its Extraordinary Past

One of Rutgers University's most enduring icons, Paul Robeson, was brought to life for two Rutgers University Newark (RUN) students during a dinner meeting on Thursday, January 11, 2018. Grace Appiah (RUN Class of 2020) and Harry Sisco (RUN Class of 2021), both *RU Ready for Work* graduates (an RUN-based career readiness program for 10th - 12th grade Newark public high school students) and current scholars in the RUN Honors Living - Learning Community (HLLC), met with Marilyn and Susan Robeson, daughter-in-law and granddaughter of the accomplished African American, Rutgers College Class of 1919 alum.

The stimulating conversation extended to almost four hours, as the students and family members delved into the details of Mr. Robeson's passion for politics, activism and social justice as well as his love for sports and the arts. The students admit that they were unaware of the depth and breadth of the man whose name graces many Rutgers University buildings and in whose honor many scholarships and awards are bestowed. Prior to meeting with the family, Grace and Harry read articles and watched the 1999 documentary, "Here I Stand", based on the 1958 book written by Robeson and collaborator Lloyd L. Brown. Excited by their research, the two young campus change agents came prepared to discuss how Mr. Robeson's experience could inform their own passion for leadership. Marilyn and Susan enthusiastically answered questions and shared revelations and insights. Inspired by the exchange, both the students and family expressed an interest in arranging future interactions.

The dinner meeting was among the donated for silent auction at the Rutgers University African-American Alumni Alliance (RAAA) 14th Annual Hall of Fame Dinner, held on October 14, 2017, at Rutgers University-Newark. Jim Savage, a Rutgers University alum and Chair of the Rutgers Class of 1971 - 45th Milestone Campaign Committee to Build Paul Robeson Plaza and Rutgers alum Paul Von der Heyden arranged and picked up the tab for the dinner meeting. Ray Lamela, President of Top Shelf Event Staffing and RAAA supporter, donated his winning bid to RUN students via the Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP) that had worked closely with RAAA to plan and execute the event.

RAAA Inc. strives to foster and enhance unity amongst Alumni, students, faculty and staff of African ancestry via programming and active participation in the lives of Rutgers students. OUCP facilitates partnerships between university and community that showcase RUN's faculty, staff and students. Grace and Harry were among more than 15 RUN students who volunteered to support the October Hall of Fame event. For more information about Paul Robeson:

<https://news.rutgers.edu/feature/paul-robeson-renaissance-man-fought-injustice/20160214#.WnHjOclm7cs>



Above: Susan and Marilyn Robeson flanked by Rutgers Newark undergraduates Grace Appiah and Harry Sisco.

My conversation with Marilyn and Susan gave me deeper insight from the past and created a connection between the present and future. As a young Black activist, I learned that I have no choice but to continue to live the legacy of Paul Robeson and other people that have fought to secure spaces for the Black Community.

~Grace Appiah

I was really amazed and blessed to have this opportunity to meet these two remarkable individuals. In the future, I would love to collaborate with them to spread the story of Paul Robeson and stay in touch, creating a longtime relationship.

~Harry Sisco

Below: Student, Harry Sisco shows off an autographed copy of "The Whole World in His Hands: A Pictorial Biography of Paul Robeson," by Susan Robeson, a gift from the family.

