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USVI Native and Diplomatic Pioneer Terence Todman Honored with Dedicated Conference Room in Buenos Aires

The St. Thomas native, who served as a US ambassador for 6 countries, was celebrated on Wednesday with the unveiling of the room

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Tsehai Alfred **June 13, 2024**

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Terence A. Todman

On Wednesday, the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina unveiled the Terence A. Todman Conference Room— an official meeting space honoring and displaying the life and work of the USVI-born diplomat.

“If you walk through that room, you're going to learn a lot more about his career and the courage that one person took to change the world,” said Marc Stanley, the U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, during the unveiling event.

Born in 1926 on St. Thomas, Terence Todman served as a U.S. ambassador to six nations— Chad, Guinea, Costa Rica, Spain, Denmark, and Argentina— before retiring in 2014 on his home island and passing away later that same year. As the son of a maid and a grocery store clerk who went on to become a high-ranking diplomat fluent in seven languages, Mr. Todman broke many barriers, which the conference room—named “A Life Less Ordinary”— highlighted.



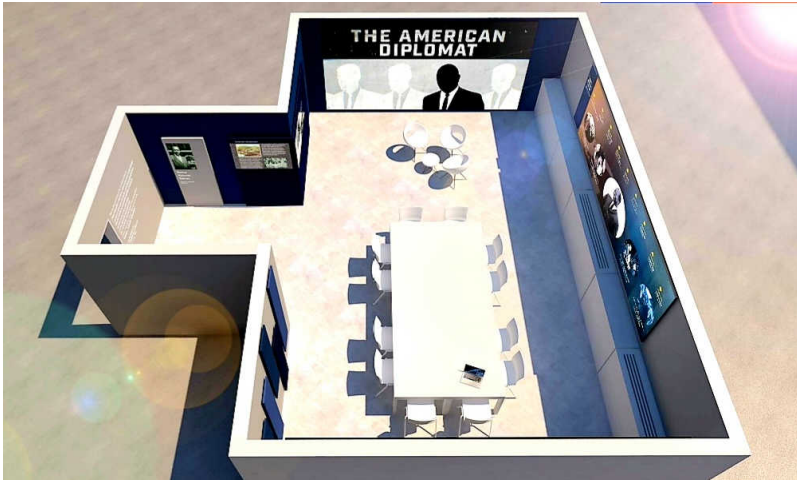
A rendering of the Terence A. Todman Conference Room

“The courage it took to be a Black ambassador for the United States in 1969. The courage it took to integrate a lunchroom in Virginia in the 60s, it took a lot. As he said, he was, I think, one of only two black Americans working in the State Department,” Ambassador Stanley said.

Early in his career, Mr. Todman challenged the Virginia segregation law which required black diplomats to eat separately from their white colleagues in the cafeteria at the Foreign Service Institute. Ambassador Todman’s activism, which altered the landscape of his own career, was just one of his many trailblazing accomplishments. He was also the first Black ambassador to a Spanish-speaking country when he became the ambassador of Costa Rica in 1974. He later served as the ambassador to Argentina from 1989 to 1993.?

The exhibit conference room allows viewers to look into Mr. Todman’s pioneering career, with visual timelines of his major accomplishments, and panels written in the many languages he mastered, among other installments. “All of these things tell this one giant story,” remarked Joseph Angemi Jr., the senior chair of the Office of Cultural Heritage who helped create the exhibit.

According to the designers, the center display, which shows a black outline of Ambassador Todman amongst white outlined diplomats, symbolizes the late diplomat’s reality of often being the only black face in a room. “The imagery is powerful and pulls the room together in a really interesting way,” Mr. Angemi noted.



A rendering of the Terence A. Todman Conference Room

For Stacey Williams, a mentee of Ambassador Todman who currently serves as the chief of staff in the Bureau of Budget and Planning for the State Department, the honorary conference room answers a question that he believes we all ask ourselves: “Will anyone remember my name?” Now that Mr. Todman’s name has been engraved in the cafeteria at the State Department in Washington, DC, affixed to the road leading to the Cyril E. King Airport, and in pride of place in a US Embassy Buenos Aires conference room, Mr. Williams believes Ambassador Todman’s name will be indefinitely remembered.

Correction: Friday June 14, 2024

A previous version of this article misspelled the name of Joseph Angemi Jr., the senior chair of the Office of Cultural Heritage who helped create the exhibit. We've updated the story to reflect the correct information.