

Be Bold: An Interview with Tia Mitchell of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Michael Walsh, HBCU-ACC Advisor | February 2023



Tia Mitchell was a guest speaker to the [HBCU-Africa Correspondents Corps](#). She is the Washington Correspondent of [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#).

What is unique about student newspapers? Why do you think that they matter?

Student newspapers are unique because they look at the news of the day, at the institution and beyond, from a campus-oriented lens. We see the difference, for example, in the coverage of the recent shooting at Michigan State University from campus entities compared to more general media. But it applies to far less consequential events and other types of news from the mundane to the hyper-localized. No one else follows the drama in student government or the pageantry of homecoming like student newspapers. And, when campus-based events draw attention from general media, student newspapers are often the first source mainstream media turns to.

What is unique about HBCU student newspapers? Why do you think that they matter?

I am a proud product of an HBCU student newspaper, *The Famuan* at Florida A&M University. I won a Hearst Award covering a bombing on campus by a racist perpetrator. This experience exemplifies the uniqueness of HBCU student media. We have the same insight and sensitivity that comes with being campus based, with the additional layer of insight and sensitivity that comes from being Black press. It's the best of both worlds and makes HBCU student newspapers top notch not only in covering their schools and HBCU issues but also issues related to the Black community. You won't find better coverage of important issues like the Black Lives Matter movement and discussions on censoring books and teachings on race than in HBCU student newspapers.

What is the first piece of advice that you would give a HBCU student reporter who aspires to become a foreign correspondent? Why?

My first piece of advice is to get all the experience and clips/tape that they can by staying involved with their campus media and seeking internships every summer. I would tell them to get as much general experience as they can because there is a chance their first job that gets their foot in the door will be in local news covering city council meetings or crime. But at the same time, they should be seeking experience on the national level by looking for political or DC-based internships whenever they can. And then when it is time for graduation, look both at full-time opportunity but also consider fellowships at national media like *Politico* or the *New York Times*.

If you were asked to share one story from your time as a foreign correspondent with HBCU student reporters, what would it be? Why?

It would be to share [my story](#) of covering the riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6. That story required me to stay calm and focused in a scary situation knowing that it would go down as an important day in history and it was paramount for me as a journalist to document. I remained alert and engaged as things became more chaotic around me and even after we were trapped in the House gallery. I never stopped posting to my Twitter feed. And as soon as we were safe, I dictated an article to my colleague. Later, I did live streams on Facebook and Twitter to answer questions that our audience had about the insurrection. And of course I followed the story for days, including attending every public meeting held by the Jan. 6 Select Committee. The main takeaway I hope student reporters remember from this is to be bold, remember your mission and see it through.

Which foreign policy issues do you think most merit the attention of HBCU student reporters? Why?

I would suggest prioritizing two things: 1) Think about what your target audience is most focused on. Is your audience most worried about the effects of the floods in Nigeria or about Russia's war with Ukraine or another foreign policy issue elsewhere? Whatever they are talking about most, making that your priority; 2) But you can also prioritize what interests you most. Where there is natural interest and curiosity, there will be a motivation and comfort level when there is time to do journalism.