

UCD Clinton Institute for American Studies

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Ambassador Swing tells Global Diaspora Forum that migration is a solution not a problem



**Ambassador
William Lacy Swing:
spoke of the need
to change the
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THE Global Diaspora and Development Forum, presented by the UCD Clinton Institute and Diaspora Matters and supported by Irish Aid, was held in Dublin on 31st October and 1st November. It brought together international policymakers, civil society leaders, development agents and scholars to discuss the forms and functions of diasporas in development practice and address global examples of diaspora engagement. The tone was set by the words of President Bill Clinton, who sent a supportive video message:

“What you are doing should be a model for the rest of the world, so thanks for increasing the positive forces of our interdependence at a time when there is so much negative dominating the headlines.”

This was a message that spoke to the ethos of the Forum as we sought to ex-

plore the productive, shared challenges and opportunities of diaspora engagement with a sense that it is a dynamic force for change and a mirror of our global interdependence. Many speakers were conscious of the need to draw attention to the many positive contributions of migrant peoples to contemporary societies. The focus on diaspora accentuated these more constructive energies.

In his plenary address Ambassador William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organisation for Migration, underscored the fact that migration is a “megatrend” in the 21st century, an era of unprecedented human mobility. He spoke of the need to “change the narrative on migration,” arguing that it has been viewed as a problem to be solved rather than a solution to a problem. In an eloquent and

thoughtful address he concluded that the real challenge of migration is a challenge for all societies, to learn to manage diversity.

Several Forum speakers took up the idea of “diaspora capital” in commentary on direct investment, including remittances, philanthropy and entrepreneurship, but also defining this more broadly in terms of human and knowledge capitals. In the opening session Kingsley Aikins, of Diaspora Matters, stressed the importance of understanding “diaspora capital flows” as a defining feature of the confluence of diaspora with the age of globalisation. He noted the “soft power” qualities of diaspora engagement and presented several examples of successful engagement by Indian,

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Lively debate on the conflict in Syria

On 19th November 2014 the Clinton Institute hosted a discussion on “Conflict in Syria” with a strong focus on the question of how policymakers and media in the West should respond to the interrelated problems of the rise of ISIS and relations with the Assad regime.

The discussion was led by Patrick Smyth, a former foreign correspondent and current Foreign Policy Editor with *The Irish Times*, and Nader Hashemi, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver and author of *The Syria Dilemma* (MIT Press, 2013).

Smyth spoke first, focusing on the idea of “humanitarian intervention” and arguing that there is a quietism in Ireland about the ethics and politics of international action,

reflecting in some part the history of Irish “neutrality” and which has led to “self-indulgent agonising about military action.”

Professor Hashemi spoke of “the pivotal moment” in Syria as the rise of ISIS poses fresh challenges in the region and globally. He noted the origins of the Syrian conflict in the “Arab Spring” with the 2011 uprising promising the overthrow of the House of Al-Assad. To date, he argued, the international community - and most significantly the United States - has failed to act to remove Assad either by political or military means.

He said that the conflict was destabilising the region in ways that threatened US national security interests, rejuvenating Al-Qaeda and heightening sectarian

divisions across the Arab-Islamic world.

Professor Hashemi stated that “Today, Syria is a moral litmus test for the international community” which is failing to act in the face of state-sanctioned war crimes and crimes against humanity. He argued for the use of force to save starving civilians and to “change the battlefield conditions” with a view to shifting the negotiations.

The audience took up the discussion with some zeal and there were lively comments on “Ireland’s response” to the conflict, with attention to both political and media elites. Some explicitly questioned the editorial stance of *The Irish Times* while others bemoaned a “lack of political will” across Irish society in the face of an international outrage.

Discussion in the US embassy on midterm elections

On Wednesday, October 22, 2014, the UCD Clinton Institute organised, in co-operation with the US Embassy Dublin, a public discussion about the upcoming midterm elections in the United States. Richard Downes, of RTE, moderated a panel discussion that included Larry Donnelly of the University of Galway, Paul Gillespie of *The Irish Times*, and Dr Jack Thompson of the UCD Clinton Institute. About 90 people attended the event which was held at the US Embassy.

The discussion included several components. First, Jack Thompson provided a structural overview of American politics. He noted that while demographic trends

increasingly favour Democrats in Presidential elections, Republicans enjoy a structural advantage when it comes to Congress, especially in midterm election years, when turnout is lower, older, and whiter. He also discussed the reasons for growing political polarisation as well as the roles played by race, gender, and inequality.

In particular, he noted the increasing diversity in the United States and the fact that even as the percentage of Latino voters increases every four years, the percentage of white voters shrinks by about two percent. He also predicted that Hillary Clinton would run for President in 2016 and discussed the reasons why she is the

current front-runner.

Next, Larry Donnelly discussed some of the current issues in American politics, such as inequality, and he also provided a detailed analysis of some close races in states such as Kansas and Kentucky.

Then, Paul Gillespie covered US foreign policy. He focused on current challenges such as the civil war in Syria, relations with Russia, and the economic crisis in Europe. Finally, the panelists made predictions about the election - all predicted that the Republicans would maintain a sizeable majority in the House of Representatives and take control of the Senate - and answered a number of questions from the audience.

Global Diaspora Forum meets in Dublin

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Chinese, Israeli and Irish governments - all had successfully networked their diasporas.

Other speakers focused on the role of media and ICTs in facilitating diaspora capital flows in terms of communication and networking. Teddy Ruge, a social change activist from Uganda, argued that social media was providing new forms of community and activism for the African diasporas and helping to “kickback the single narrative of the continent....everybody else was writing about us but we can now write about ourselves.” Dana Diminescu, the Director of Migration and Digital Studies at the Foundation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris, illustrated the Diaspora e-atlas which has archived and observed over 8,000 migrant websites to map clusters and networks of diaspora communications across the Web.

Several commentators noted that the resources of diasporas are poorly understood by international organisations and governments accustomed to formalised structures and practices of development. This was clearly articulated in a discussion session on the roles of diaspora in humanitarian action and conflict transformation. Catherine Bragg, former Deputy Head of the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, commented on why humanitarian organisations tend to treat diasporas with some suspicion, as insufficiently neutral to fulfil humanitarian mandates. Yet, she believes this is changing, not least due to the growing realisation that “humanitarian effectiveness will require more actors” and because diaspora groups are demonstrating capacity to fill gaps in knowledge and action.

The second day of the Forum juxtaposed sessions on African diasporas in Ireland and the UK and Ireland’s diaspora engagement. The first of these sessions further illuminated the undervalued resources of diaspora agents in development. Siddo Deva, of Comic Relief in the UK, outlined the pragmatic reasons for the British government’s engagement with resident African diasporas while pointing up some of the complexities of measuring diaspora action in development. Speakers involved in African diaspora community cultures and politics in Ireland referred to the energies of their communities as key resources for development action yet lamented the limited engagement of Irish government agencies and NGOs with these communities.

The last panel session of the Forum was devoted to Ireland’s diaspora engagement, exploring several dimensions of this, including philanthropy, tourism and sport. It involved presentations on initiatives that are widely viewed as notable successes - including The Gathering and Connect Ireland - and on an organisation, the Gaelic Athletic Associa-



Michaella Vanore, of the Maastricht School of Governance, speaking at the forum.

tion, which continues to play a crucial role as a resource and network for the Irish diaspora. Audience members from outside Ireland expressed interest in the character and range of Irish diaspora engagements and in the lessons being learned.

Overall, the Global Diaspora and Development Forum was an intense few days of discussion that illuminated synergies among practitioners in the fields of diaspora and development and laid the foundations for strategic collaborations and initiatives that are still being discussed. One such initiative was announced during the Forum, the establishment of a Diaspora Institute under the direction of Dr Martin Russell, one of the organisers of the event. The institute is designed to bridge the worlds of research, policy and practitioners in this emergent area of interest. The initiative echoes and materialises the aim of the Forum organisers to establish Dublin as an epicentre for diaspora research, training and policy.

Talk by William Harris

On Friday, November 21, Professor J. William Harris spoke at the UCD Clinton Institute on the subject of ‘History, Race, and National Identity in the American South since the Civil War.’ Prof Harris argued that two distinct views of Southern identity emerged in the years after the Civil War. Among African-Americans, he contended, an inclusive version developed in which all Americans, regardless of colour or ethnicity, were included. White Southerners, in contrast, he avers, constructed a more exclusive sense of identity that was largely a product of the Civil War era and the myth of the ‘Lost Cause’, in which they fought bravely for states rights, not to preserve slavery, and were only defeated because of the North’s overwhelming advantage in population and economic resources. The talk prompted a lively discussion among the attendance of students and historians.

Alumni Voices



David Collins recalls the impact of his studies at the Institute

The Clinton experience

SITTING in a full auditorium last year, not 10 metres from former president Bill Clinton, listening to him speak informally about global conflict and his years in the White House, I allowed myself reminisce a little and think about my time at the Institute and how it had influenced my views on America.

I had completed the MA in American Studies six years previously in what was a turbulent time for the country, President Bush was in his final years in power and word was spreading about a fresh-faced young senator from Illinois who had made the keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic Convention. The country was embroiled in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as the world still reeled from the impact of 9/11 and the response of the Bush administration.

Academically I had wanted to study the US further and particularly the evolution of American thought, especially that of the right; this would also direct my gaze westwards from an MA in European Studies I

had competed two years before,

Professionally I was also undergoing some change. At the time of the 2001 attacks I was coming to the end of a three-year period with US giant Citibank. I remember going into work shortly after the attacks and the building being on virtual lockdown as it and many others sought out the right response to what had happened.

I started with Barclays soon after and was in a position to remain working full-time with them whilst I completed the MA five years later, managing somehow to juggle work commitments and essay completion dates. However change was in the air and I made the move to Google during the final semester – there seemed no better organisation to witness first-hand the exportation of American culture and the effect of the internet on American cultural hegemony and globalisation in general.

My academic interest however soon spread to the triumvirate of Wolfowitz, Cheney and Rumsfeld, who, in the eyes of some, were

the puppet-masters of the seemingly hapless President. This led me backwards to the writings of Leo Strauss and from there, through the concepts of providence, millennialism and pilgrim thought, back to Europe where my studies had taken me two years before.

Upon graduation my girlfriend and I decided on a 1,500 mile road-trip in the US. Our route took us from Washington, down the east coast to Savannah in Georgia and then across the south to Arkansas. This was to be a fantastic experience; staying clear of the more well-known US destinations, our trip took us across vast swathes of the country that are not often represented in media here. Whilst I don't agree with the term 'the real America', our trip gave us insight into the mind-set of a nation who felt under attack and whose dominance in world affairs was coming to a close after a century of hegemony.

All this history seemed to be etched in the face of the visibly older, greyer but no less engaging man who was fielding questions from the audience around me. The recognisable southern accent was still there and the warmth of those around me was testament to his continued ability to engage and maintain that illusion that makes everyone in the room think he or she was the sole focus of his attention. I was no less impressed.

My own road has since taken me to Canada where I worked for a couple of years before returning to Ireland in 2011. I now work for Western Union, a company whose history seems embedded in the American story and whose telegrams, and later transfers, would support the great movement westwards that epitomises the American story, and what am I doing? Devising strategies to ensure that these same services are not been used to fund global terrorism. I think President Clinton would approve.

•David Collins was in the MA class of 2008. He is currently Senior Manager for AML and Counter Terrorist Financing at Western Union.

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Neoliberalism and American Literature

UCD Clinton Institute is hosting a conference on "Neoliberalism and American Literature" on the 20-21 February. The conference will focus on the production, form and consumption of literature under conditions of neoliberalism. How has American literature responded to the political, economic and cultural dominance of neoliberalism? What does neoliberalism mean for practices of writing, reading, and selling books?

Plenaries will be given by Prof Elizabeth Maddock Dillon (North-eastern University), Prof Liam Kennedy (University College Dublin), Prof Walter Benn Michaels (University of Illinois at Chicago), Prof Donald Pease (Dartmouth College) and Prof Stephen Shapiro (University of Warwick).

Further details from Catherine Carey: catherine.carey@ucd.ie