

Unconventional Emissary

Avant's Celebrity Ties Aid Her Work As Ambassador To Bahamas

BY MICHAEL H. COTTMAN

Sitting inside her spacious ocean-view home in Nassau, Nicole Avant, the U.S. ambassador to The Bahamas, talked about helping children.

"Education is my No. 1 priority," said Avant, 42, who was appointed to the post by President Obama in 2009. "A good education changes everything and makes a huge difference in people's lives. When children are expected to do well, they usually rise to the occasion."

Avant, the first Black woman to be appointed as U.S. ambassador to The Bahamas, is not a conventional emissary. In fact, she's something of a celebrity diplomat: She is the daughter of music mogul Clarence Avant and goddaughter of legendary music producer Quincy Jones.

Avant, who grew up in Beverly Hills, Calif., is on a first-name basis with influential people like Bill Cosby, Diana Ross and Bill Clinton. She worked at A&M Records and also served as vice president of the family businesses — publishing companies Interior Music and Avant Garde.

When Obama called Avant to offer her the prestigious post in The Bahamas, he put her at ease.

"The president told me 'just be you; do what you do — there,'" she said.

Today, Avant is taking charge of her own initiatives — and she's determined to help improve the lives of disadvantaged students in The Bahamas.

Since becoming ambassador, Avant

has focused on five priority initiatives: Education, alternative energy, economic and small business development, women's empowerment and raising awareness about the challenges facing people with disabilities.

She has called on celebrity friends to visit The Bahamas to help empower people. Avant invited Magic Johnson to serve as the keynote speaker at a business development seminar because, she explained, Johnson understands small business and entrepreneurship. *Access Hollywood* host Shaun Robinson was asked to speak with female students one on one about believing in themselves. Avant asked former NFL quarterback Rodney Peete to speak to Black men about how to embrace boys with autism since Peete's son is autistic.

U.S. Ambassador Nicole Avant says education is her No. 1 priority.



"You could hear men saying thank you for connecting us to someone who gets it, someone who understands what they were feeling," Avant said.

Bahamian officials praise Avant, and she is immersing herself in the community in The Bahamas, instead of observing from afar.

"We're fortunate to have an ambassador who understands the relationship — and the economic relationship — between The Bahamas and the United States," said Vincent S. Vanderpool-Wallace, The Bahamas Minister of Tourism and Aviation. "She is very

savvy. She recognizes the power of promoting the arts and how this adds value to The Bahamas."

There are 700 islands of Bahamas sprinkled over 100,000 square miles of ocean starting just 50 miles off the coast of Florida.

"Each island has its own personality," said Avant. "There are so many different things to see and so many things to travel here for and there are so many wonderful islands that people don't know about."

Avant has adapted quickly to her role as a diplomat but also said life as a U.S. ambassador can be quite "lonely."

Her husband, Ted Sarandos, Chief Content Officer for Netflix, is based in Los Angeles. "I miss my family," Avant said. "It was a difficult adjustment to life in the bubble."

But the best part of her job, Avant said, is "waking up knowing that I'm representing President Obama as his personal representative here in The Bahamas and knowing that I'm serving as a diplomat under the first African-American president of the United States — that, in itself, is enough."//

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