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## JOINT CHIEFS CHAIRMAN'S VISIT INSPIRES STUDENTS

## A HOMECOMING FOR GEN. 'CQ' BROWN JR.

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | October 4, 2024*Above: Rachel Freeman, CNU President William G. Kelly, Gen. Charles 'CQ' Brown Jr. and Stephany Lindo-Batlle**Read time: about 2 min*

Gen. Charles 'CQ' Brown Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — the nation's highest-ranking military officer — instructed and inspired President's Leadership Program members and ROTC cadets during a daylong campus visit.

The highlight was a student-led conversation in front of an audience of more than 1,500 in the [Ferguson Center for the Arts](#), the building that incorporates what was Ferguson High School, where Brown was among the graduates of the Class of 1980.

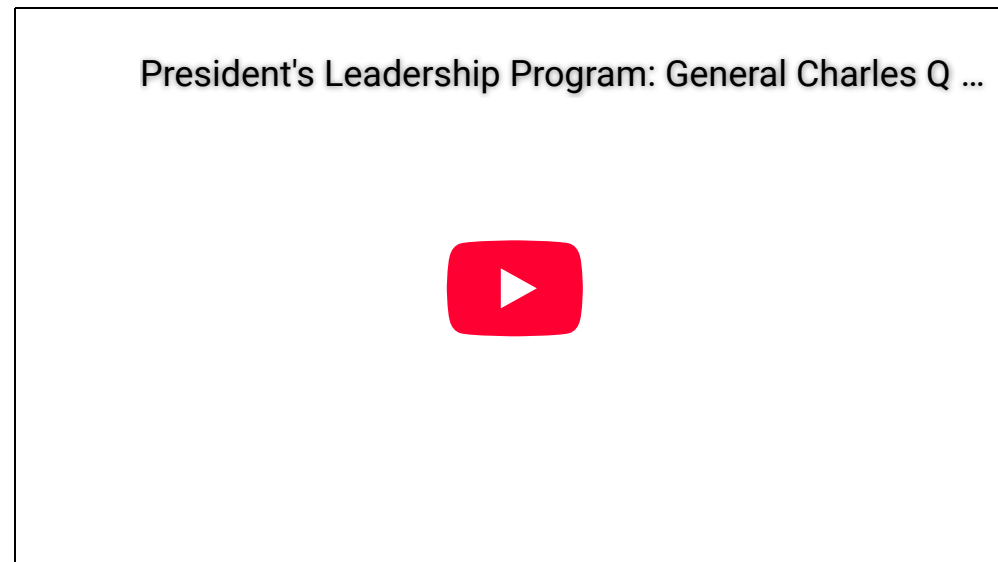
"People come up to me and say 'you're an inspiration' and I say 'I'm just doing my job. I'm just 'CQ' Brown, born in San Antonio Texas, graduated from high school here in Newport News.' But you never know who you're going to impact by the work that you do," Brown said.

That impact was palpable among the students, faculty, staff and community members who filled Diamonstein Concert Hall. It was visible earlier when Brown met with ROTC cadets and [Military Science](#) faculty. With his wife, Sharene Brown, at his side, he walked the halls of his old high school, past what are now music rehearsal rooms. And he met privately with some of his classmates as well as Newport News and regional leaders. Along the way, he



stopped for numerous photos and selfies.

"It's a tremendous honor to welcome you back home," President William G. Kelly told the General at the PLP event. "As a graduate of Ferguson High School, I can only imagine the memories that must come flooding back to you as you walk the grounds and the halls of what used to be your high school. The place has certainly changed since your time as a student!"



As enjoyable as witnessing that change may have been, Brown focused his remarks on motivating students to embrace leadership and pursue meaningful impact for the benefit of society. At the meeting with the ROTC cadets, he described personal failures and challenges he has overcome. At the event with PLP participants, he talked about his approach to leadership and how to accomplish goals.

Several students in the audience asked Brown questions, as did Stephany Lindo-Battle and Rachel Freeman, the two student hosts for the evening. Lindo-Battle '25 ([Criminology](#)) is a PLP member and president of the Latino Student Association. Freeman '25 ([Political Science](#)), also a PLP member, is a fourth-year ROTC cadet planning a military career.

"How do you bring everyone together to focus on a singular mission, especially in high-stakes situations like those you've faced in the military?" Freeman asked.

"If you think about it, leadership is like a salesperson, you have a vision — you're trying to sell that vision to those that you are privileged to lead and get them to buy into the vision," Brown answered. "If they buy into the vision, you'll get them to execute, but you also have to be willing to adjust the vision."

The audience included a handful of special guests who are legendary for their ability to execute a vision and a mission. The Tuskegee Airmen of Hampton Roads wore their signature crimson red jackets, sitting as a group near the front of the Concert Hall. The fearless skills of the African-American pilots during World War II earned them the nicknames "Red-Tails" and "Red-Tail Angels" because of the red tails on their aircraft.

"Over the last 20 years, the Ferguson Center for the Arts has hosted incredible artists, world-famous performers, and thought-leaders," Kelly said. "Tonight, we are honored to add you, General Brown (and the Tuskegee Airmen), to that list."