

Famous New Yorker Jerome “Brud” Holland



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Racism kept “Brud” Holland from playing in the National Football League in the 1930s, but it didn’t stop him from becoming a widely respected educator, diplomat and all-around public servant.

Jerome Heartwell Holland was born in Auburn, Cayuga County, on January 9, 1916. At age eight he started helping his father at his job as a gardener and caretaker. “Brud” (short for brother) liked school better and excelled in both academics and athletics at Auburn High School. Brud became the first member of his family to go to college when he enrolled in prestigious Cornell University. He then became the first black player on Cornell’s powerful football team.

Brud Holland played both offense and defense and became Cornell’s most popular player. He received one of the highest honors in college football in 1937, when he was named to *Collier’s* magazine’s All-America Team. Holland played against NFL talent on collegiate all-star teams, but no NFL team would sign him after he earned his bachelor’s degree in 1939. Black athletes were barred from professional football until 1946.

In 1939, joining the NFL wasn’t yet a high priority for many college players, white or black. The NFL didn’t have the glamor of professional baseball, and many college graduates could earn more money in the business world or academia. Like many ex-athletes, Jerome Holland continued his education. He earned a master’s degree in sociology from Cornell and studied for a doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania while teaching and coaching football at black colleges. During World War II, he worked as a personnel director in charge of training black employees at a Pennsylvania shipyard.

Holland earned his Ph.D. in 1950. He worked as a researcher for the Pew Foundation until a chance meeting with the governor of Delaware led to his appointment as president of Delaware State University in 1953. The underfunded black college was considered an academic disgrace, but Holland reversed its fortunes. He proved himself an able administrator and fundraiser, increasing enrollments, endowments and government support while making Delaware State financially and academically respectable.

In 1960, Holland became president of Hampton Institute in Virginia. He was increasingly recognized outside the black community for his leadership. In 1964, he was appointed to the board of governors of the American Red Cross. The most surprising phase of Holland’s career began when President Richard Nixon appointed him U.S. ambassador to Sweden in 1970. His appointment was controversial in Sweden, where the U.S. war in Vietnam was very unpopular. Some Swedes took the appointment of a black ambassador as an insult, while Americans saw it as proof that their country wasn’t racist. Ambassador Holland was harassed by antiwar protesters, including American draft-dodgers, throughout his two-year tenure. He also earned the respect of many Swedes who felt the extremists had treated him unfairly.

Back in the U.S., Holland served on numerous corporate boards and became the first black director of the New York Stock Exchange. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter named him chairman of the Red Cross board of governors. Holland held that post until his death on January 13, 1985. His election to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1965 was only a footnote to a life of far greater accomplishments.



Auburn is located in the Finger Lakes region of the state about 175 miles west of Albany and 125 miles east of Buffalo.

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