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**U.S. ballerina Misty Copeland visits Cuba as cultural ambassador**

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Havana – Misty Danielle Copeland, the first African American ballerina at the American Ballet Theatre, one of the most prestigious dance venues in the United States, is in Cuba at present after being named Sports and Cultural Envoy by the Department of State.

As part of the program for her visit, which seeks to promote cultural dialogue between Cuba and the United States, Copeland on Tuesday visited the National Ballet of Cuba, headed by legendary ballerina and choreographer Alicia Alonso, who is 95.

At the National Ballet, Copeland first seated herself on the floor and observed the exercises being undertaken by students of classical ballet, later joining the warmup herself.

She is also scheduled to visit the Carlos Acosta dance company and the Liza Alfonso dance company, two of the most prestigious on the island.

On her visits to the dance centers, Copeland will meet and exchange ideas with teachers and some of the more than 8,000 dance students currently training in Cuba.

While in Cuba, "She will tell her unique personal story to emphasize how diversity of race, ethnicity, geography, gender and experience contributes to the fabric of the United States. Copeland will address how young people should focus on health and wellness over body image," the State Department said in announcing her trip.

Copeland will be in Cuba until Nov. 18, a visit taking place within the context of the normalization of relations between Washington and Havana begun in late 2014 by Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro after more than half a century without diplomatic ties.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1982 and raised in California, Copeland began dancing relatively late - at age 13 -

training at the San Francisco Ballet School, among other venues.

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