



BLACK HISTORY MONTH SPOTLIGHT ON DONALD L. COULTER

A Career Success Like in The Movies



Donald Coulter (far right) speaks on a panel about the future of cybersecurity and zero trust architectures at a Zero Trust Summit in 2023.

Donald Coulter, Senior Science Advisor for Cybersecurity in the Technology Centers Division, joined S&T in 2022 during the pandemic. His primary responsibilities are providing technical advice across the DHS cybersecurity R&D portfolio and facilitating interagency and international collaboration. He also advises senior leadership on where to focus cybersecurity efforts now and in the future by looking at the big picture to find out what the underlying challenges and risks for cybersecurity attacks are, and how to fundamentally eliminate or significantly reduce broad classes of attacks.

"I love cybersecurity and the research that we do here," said Donald.

As long as he can remember, Donald has had a love for computers. It is a passion he shared with his father from a very early age as his father also had a deep interest in computers.

"My parents have a picture of me as a baby trying to type on my dad's old Apple I," said Donald.

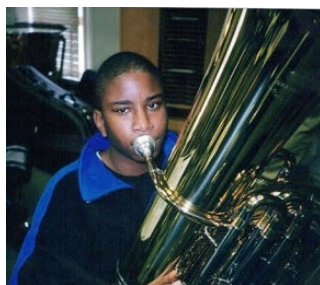
In high school, when a friend took a computer science class, Donald was inspired to study computer science himself. He loved programming and fell

in love with software development. "One of my first forays into computer security is probably all those chat rooms and people hacking in the chat rooms, booting people out, taking over the screens and putting their own content in. Thinking about how we can use our technology securely has always been interesting to me," he said.

In 2001, Donald won a band scholarship to attend Bethune-Cookman University, a historically Black university in Daytona Beach, Florida. He graduated in 2005 with a BS in Computer Science and entered the Army Materiel Command Fellows Program. He worked on smartphone and personal digital assistant programming to help protect American soldiers, so they return home safely. His career took off from there. The fellowship offered benefits that paid for master's degrees, so he completed one in Business Administration from Texas A&M University-Texarkana (2006) and another in Computer Science from Stevens Institute of Technology (2010). He spent 18 years as an Army civilian.



Donald (right) and his wife, Courtney, supervisory electronics engineer, at the 2014 Black Engineer of the Year Awards (BEYA) in STEM, where both received Special Recognition Awards. They worked for the Army's Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center (CERDEC) in two different directorates.



Donald practices playing his favorite instrument, the tuba, in high school. He would go on to get a music scholarship for college and even be part of the movie "Drumline," so it paid off!

Playing Tuba in the Movie "Drumline"

Donald played the tuba and bass trombone in his high school jazz band and in college went on to play in the "The Marching Wildcats," the Bethune-Cookman University's prestige marching band.

"Participating in the movie 'Drumline' was one of my fondest memories. We were one of the bands selected from several colleges to play in the battle of the bands at the end of the movie," said Donald. He was a freshman and was in the tuba section at the time. "That was so fun! They bussed us to Atlanta. We went to the studio to record all the music and then to the stadium to perform. They fed us and gave us, broke college students, some per diem. We even went on set and met the actors!"

He had an opportunity to speak with Nick Cannon and Orlando Jones, the movie's lead actors. "They joked around about Hollywood and the industry, but they were seriously into the music, the showmanship, and the hard work it takes to learn and perform these shows on a weekly basis," Donald said.

Spending Quality Time with Family

Donald tries to stay active, even while working. During Teams meetings and other activities, he walks on a treadmill, which he "stole" from... his wife.

"Once, while she was out of town, I thought 'let me see what this is all about.' And it never made it back to her office," he said laughing. "I might have fallen off once or twice, but it's a great approach to squeeze in movement in such traditionally sedentary occupations. While just walking and moving your body, you can sometimes have great insights. The treadmill keeps me and my mind fit."

Donald spends his spare time mentoring his 9-year-old son Donald III, who wants to be a scientist when he grows up. "He likes lab coats and wants to do chemical potions," Donald said, gushing about his son. "My wife Courtney and I like to expose him to a myriad of things, and he gets interested in so many things that we can just watch it happen and then give him the resources and point him in the right direction – he plays piano, wants to play horn and the tuba, and to start a father-son band. He even found a Scratch programming book we've had for a while and has been making little programs."

Donald loves reading nonfiction books about leadership, personal finance, and behavioral science. And he enjoys listening to audiobooks with his wife, who is a book reviewer on the side. "Our books are overflowing all over the house. It's crazy!" he said.

Donald's favorite books include Jim Butcher's "The Dresden Files" and Leigh Bardugo's "Six of Crows." He recommends to science and engineering lovers "Accessory to War: The Unspoken Alliance Between Astrophysics and the Military" by Neil de Grasse Tyson. If Donald is not listening to an audiobook, he's probably listening to a podcast, or playing hip hop or jazz albums.

Giving Back to His Community



Donald (left) pictured with the 23rd International Grand Polaris (meaning President), Dr. Sean D. Housen, Sr. at his Fraternity's White Tie Gala in 2023. His region won Region of the Year!

Donald is passionate about giving back to his community. He is a member of the local grad chapters of the international African American Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., an organization founded on September 19, 1963, at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, to advocate for social change and civil rights. He's held many positions locally and nationally and remains active. In addition to participating in his local chapter's executive board, he serves as the Eastern Region's Director of Technology. He was recently asked to represent his region on the Fraternity's Board of Directors.

During the pandemic, Donald and his teammates worked on vaccine awareness programs, providing resources to the historically underserved community on how to get vaccinated, what the risks and opportunities are, and why they should do it. "There is a very difficult history with the medical community toward Black communities, which has led to a healthy skepticism. We try to make sure people are aware of the facts and how to vaccinate against the flu and COVID," he said.

"Black History Month is an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the contributions Black Americans have made to our society and experiences we've had in America and across the world," he said. "Often we focus on the hard times and challenges that we must remember to not repeat, but we also need to keep in mind that we've done a lot. We look at people who built the country, and we wouldn't be in a good economic position or on a world stage if it weren't for a lot of the hard labor and work that my ancestors put in. But from a societal perspective, many great things, science, technology and commercial breakthroughs, and many contributions to the arts and sports and other areas have come from Black Americans."

Donald's family roots go all the way to Alabama from where his ancestors moved north during the Great Migration in the 1930s. His parents are from Ohio but moved to Northern Virginia where Donald grew up.

Donald is inspired by Black American scientist and astronomer Walter McAfee who was the first person to help bounce a radar signal off the moon. His son's middle name, McAfee, is named after him.

"I celebrate Black history every month," Donald said. "To me, it's just another opportunity to remind ourselves of, reflect on and celebrate the advancements that we've made."

To learn more about his cybersecurity work and passion, listen to the S&T podcast episode [A Cat and Mouse Game](#).

Access our [archived spotlight articles](#).



Donald, his wife Courtney and their son Donald III hanging out in Newport, Rhode Island, during their annual trip last August to the Newport Jazz Festival. They hope to visit the festival again this year.