

2-10-2006

## Our First African American President?

Mandi Bird  
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/features>

---

### ScholarWorks Citation

Bird, Mandi, "Our First African American President?" (2006). *Features*. 32.  
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/features/32>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Features by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

# Our First African American President?

## The Story of Condoleezza Rice's Rise

By Mandi Bird

Politics aside, no one can deny the magnitude of Condoleezza Rice's accomplishments. Antonia Felix's book *Condi*, an objective, intimate account of the secretary of state's life, relates even the earliest indications of Dr. Rice's future success.

### Auspicious Beginnings

Condoleezza was born into a highly educated family -- she is in the fourth generation of college-educated Rices. Her paternal great-grandfather attended Stillman College, one of the few schools available to African Americans at the time. There, he discovered that studying to be a minister would earn him a scholarship, so he pursued a path to the ministry. He became a Presbyterian minister after college, and later sent his son -- Condoleezza's grandfather -- to follow in his footsteps at Stillman. Rev. John Wesley Rice, Jr., Condoleezza's father, initially followed his father and grandfather to Stillman (where he eventually became dean of students), but he went on to Johnson C. Smith University.

Her mother's side was also highly-educated. According to the book, her mother graduated from Denver University. Two of Dr. Rice's great aunts were among the first graduates of the Tuskegee Institute, and another aunt earned a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Wisconsin and became a professor.

Young Condoleezza grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood, located in the highly-segregated Birmingham, Alabama, but her parents went to great lengths to shield her from racism. It was their general rule not to use public facilities because they were segregated, and instead participating in the protests of the time, they stressed that being educated was the best way to rise above. In fact, they frequently said that she would need to be "twice as good" as anyone else to succeed.

When she was ten years of age, she and her parents moved to the less racially-segregated Denver, Colorado, so her father could become an assistant dean at Denver University. By that time Condi was a rising star on the piano, and highly educated in current events from reading the newspaper every day. Her parents wanted only the best for her, so they enrolled her at St. Mary's Academy, where many children of the university faculty were educated. At that time she also began taking figure skating lessons, which she later referred to as "high priced childcare."<sup>[1]</sup>

Condoleezza passed the entrance exam at St. Mary's, but was told her I.Q. was very low, and that little should be expected of her. Her family told her to ignore the negative message, stating that it was a mistake, and they proved prophetic. She dual enrolled at Denver University and graduated from high school when she was sixteen.

With the goal of becoming a concert pianist, she continued her education at the university. Realizing that she was no piano prodigy, she decided to pursue other areas of interest. Like many college students, she was uncertain of her next move. She eventually decided to take introduction to international politics with.

Professor Josef Korbel (who coincidentally is former Secretary of State Madeline Albright's father), and quickly found her passion. She began studying Russian language independently, and today is "fluent in Russian and has research ability in Czech and French."<sup>[2]</sup>

She earned her B.A. degree in political science at the age nineteen, and went on to graduate school at the University of Notre Dame. She quickly got the attention of the faculty, by exceeding other students, particularly in her study of the Russian language. Upon completion of that year, she received her M.A. in government and returned to the Denver to begin work on a Ph.D. She was twenty-six when she finished her doctorate.

### Condi's Rise

After receiving her doctorate, she accepted a professorship position at Stanford University. During her time there she completed three fellowships in which she researched and wrote several articles and three books.

In 1988, Washington called and she was asked to serve on the National Security Council under George H.W. Bush. A year later, National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft appointed her director of Soviet and East European Affairs. Interestingly, she remembers her first task was to track down the origins of a cake sent to the president. There was no name on the box, which was a red flag to the security staff.

In 1991, Dr. Rice decided she wanted to go back to teaching at Stanford. Upon her return from D.C., she was highly sought after to serve on corporate boards including, Chevron, Trans-America, Hewlett Packard, J.P. Morgan and Charles Schwab. She also served on Notre Dame's Board of Trustees.

Two years later, she was promoted to the "number two" position of Provost at Stanford, a position she held for six years.

Over the years, Dr. Rice continued to spend time with the Bush family, and got to know our current president. When Governor George W. Bush decided to run for president, he asked her to join the "W is for Women" campaign and then asked her to stay on as his national security advisor. In 2005, she replaced Colin Powell as Secretary of State, becoming only the second woman and the second african-american to occupy the office.

### Little known facts about Condoleezza Rice

1. She was a registered Democrat and even voted for Jimmy Carter. She became a Republican because she disagreed how Carter handled Cold War. She felt the U.S. should have been more aggressive against the Russians.
2. Dr. Rice is Pro-Choice.
3. Her father's nickname for her was "Little Star."
4. She is an only child because her parents felt they could not take the love and attention away from her.
5. Her mother created the name Condoleezza from an Italian musical term, which tells the performer to play "with sweetness."
6. Her dream job is to be commissioner of the NFL.
7. She has dated several NFL football players, and was even engaged to one.
8. With Susan Ford, she co-founded the Center for a New Generation to assist at risk youth in getting their education.

*Condi* is a very quick, easy read with little in it that someone would have to think critically about (as it would be if it were more about getting the Republican agenda out). I really enjoyed it.

Anyone who reads this book will likely become inspired to do more in their life- educate themselves, help others, and travel. She is one of the big power players in our time, and the most prominent black woman perhaps in the entire world. In honor of Black History Month, we celebrate Condoleezza Rice.

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Felix. *Condi* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. 56.

<sup>[2]</sup> Felix. 123.