

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: CONDOLEEZZA RICE



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The high-stakes world of international diplomacy is fraught with stress and tension; if you watched President Bush's secretary of state from 2005

to 2009, Condoleezza Rice, stride through it, confident and smiling, only one conclusion was possible: she was having a blast.

What was so much fun? "You just don't get a chance unless you're very, very blessed to both have an opportunity to work at this level and to work at this level at a time when so much is at stake," she explained in 2005. President Bush "is really ambitious and bold in what he thinks is possible.... [P]eople who've studied international politics or studied international history know of the big, cataclysmic changes that have taken place over the centuries, and we're in one of those periods of time. And it's hard and it's complicated and it's messy, but I have enormous optimism about the outcomes here. And so I just feel really very lucky to get up every day and be able to do that. And I don't experience it as a burden. I experience it as...how did I get so lucky to get afforded this opportunity?"

It's clear that it wasn't merely luck that got Rice where she is. Listen to Secretary Rice talk about her background and it's apparent that if there is a single theme in her upbringing, it is, as she puts it,

"education, education, education." Although she grew up as a black child in Birmingham, Alabama, during the height of the civil rights movement, she lived in a protected cocoon. In the seven-square-block community where she was raised, parents worked hard to be sure their kids weren't scarred by the violence around them. Education was one way to ensure that these children would be equipped to compete and succeed in the complicated world that was emerging from the embers of the segregated South.

It was a strategy that clearly worked: that seven-block neighborhood produced the first black governor of the International Monetary Fund, a president of the University of Maryland at Baltimore, the head of the largest trauma unit in Los Angeles, the first black National Merit Scholar in Alabama, and, don't forget, of course, a secretary of state.

Rice herself became an academic, teaching political science at Stanford University before becoming provost there—the first female, the first African American, and the youngest person ever to hold the job. From there she became an adviser to the first President