
The FAITH *of*

CONDOLEEZZA RICE

LESLIE MONTGOMERY

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The Faith of Condoleezza Rice

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IN THE GARDEN

*I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me,
And He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.*

*He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet that the birds hush their singing;
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.
And He walks with me,
And He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.*

A favorite hymn of Condoleezza Rice, and a song that she and her father sang together frequently in the last days of his life.

INTRODUCTION

When I first got the idea to write this book, I thought that any publisher would jump at the chance of printing a faith-based biography on Condoleezza Rice. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. After going through two publishers who said yes and then changed their mind, I began to get a bit discouraged. I knew the Lord put the writing of this book on my heart, but it didn't seem like it was going to pan out. Then I started writing for Crossway, who saw working with me as a spiritual investment and collaboration on behalf of God's kingdom. They published two of my books back to back in 2006 and didn't hesitate when I asked them to consider this biography and the one to follow on the faith of Laura Bush. I was both encouraged and flabbergasted by their support.

I immediately began the research for this book, read every book I could find on Condoleezza Rice, compiled a list of names and phone numbers of people I'd like to interview, and put in a request to interview Condoleezza. The subsequent six-month wrestling match with the State Department public relations department ranged from "No, you can't have an interview" to "What day and time do you want to do it?" to "Dr. Rice doesn't have the time to meet with you due to the Middle East crisis." (Ah, the frustration that comes with not being Oprah or Tim Russert.) That emotional roller coaster ride caused a lot of unwanted (not to mention unneeded) frustration and

anxiety. (Ironically, when the book was completed, Condi did get a copy from a family member, read it, and had her office call with changes she felt appropriate.)

Additionally, I must admit that as I did the extensive research necessary for this book, I often feared that I was in over my head. I'm not heavily educated in politics or its terms, but as I prayed, I felt strongly that the Lord was reminding me that this wasn't a book about politics but a book about faith. Although some would argue that the two often seem interchangeable, I heard what the Lord was saying, so I tried to stay true to my course.

You will find that I used the Civil Rights Movement as a guideline in this book. I did this because Condoleezza was raised during the most heated and turbulent years of the movement in the vortex of the most violent protests against segregation and liberation—Birmingham, Alabama. For those of you like me who were not raised in the South or educated in any extensive manner on the battle that ensued for and against freedom, I'm sure you will be as shocked as I was about the brutality of the perpetrators who sought to eliminate the black race at all costs and as impressed with the perseverance and righteous defiance of those who not only sought to survive it but thrive after it. Both the hunter and the hunted in the game of slavery and liberation are a part of Condoleezza's heritage, and both have helped develop her convictions and her faith, which have contributed to who she is today.

This book has been a labor of love, a challenge, and an education, heart-wrenching and yet encouraging, frustrating but satisfying. During the writing of it I often thought to myself, *This is the ninth book you've written. You're passionate about research and writing. Why is this project so hard?* In hindsight I see that it is because the Lord made me an emotional person, and the continual ups and downs of Condoleezza's family deeply affected me. At the same time, the determination of her forefathers to gain education and to stand against prejudice inspired me, her parents' spiritual convictions challenged me, her dedication and perseverance as a

young child encouraged me, and the history of the blacks that went through hell on earth for the sake of liberation for their children and grandchildren hurt, angered, and motivated me.

Writing a book is often like putting a puzzle together. You have some idea of what the final product is supposed to look like, but as you look at some of the pieces you just can't figure out their purpose or place. Still, you grapple with the unknown, moving forward in faith, believing that at some point the unfamiliar parts will take form and start to look like that which you intended. Amazingly, the final product is always much more exquisite than the initial vision because as you wrestle with the unknown you become intimately familiar with it. Such is the case with this book. That which was vague and unclear now has a pristine clarity that rings true in my spirit. It is as if my vision was blurred at first but has suddenly become perfect. At the risk of sounding cliché, I was blind, but now I see—I see what God had in mind from the beginning. As a result I will remain forever changed by the completion of the picture this book paints and honored that the Lord chose me to paint it with words.

Ironically, the picture that unfolded for me during the writing of this book may not be the one that is revealed to you, the reader, for we all see people and life from a different perspective—one that is shaped by our own experiences, beliefs, hopes, and passions. So sit back and enjoy the unveiling of what I hope will be a life-changing experience for you as it was for me, and try to see the life and faith of Condoleezza Rice as told by her friends, family, and herself through me.

A STORY OF PREJUDICE AND PROMISE



She's been called the devil's handmaiden, a history-maker, a rock star, Bush's secret weapon, the most influential woman in the world, a rising star, a murderer due to the death toll in Iraq, and a race traitor among other things. Regardless of what opinion people come to about who she is or what label they've laid to rest on her character due to the often prejudiced and judgmental onslaught of the media or the difference of political views, everyone knows there's something uniquely different about the 5'7", African-American woman whom we currently refer to as our Secretary of State. She has a mysterious stability, an enigmatic air, and an inexplicable confidence that is void of pride—a trait that is hard to find in the world, let alone in the White House or politics. Condoleezza's impenetrable strength, mysterious ambience, and unshakable temperament are all evidence of three defining characteristics—a faith that runs deep in her heritage, a personal passion for God that runs thick through her veins, and moral convictions that are by-products of both.

To know and appreciate the faith of Condoleezza Rice, no matter what your religious preference, you must learn about hers. To understand her passion for peace, you must become personally familiar with the chaotic state of the nation in which she was born, and you must be

willing to become intimate enough with her fervor for tranquillity that you risk becoming an advocate of it yourself. To fully grasp her heart and what has motivated and pushed her to break and far exceed the limited expectations that enslaved both her race and gender for hundreds of generations before her, you must examine her roots. To taste the inspiration for democracy that flows like a river from her heart, you must learn what it is that feeds her soul. This book reveals all of this and more.

This book is not about politics. It's about a little black girl who was born into a faith-based home in the center of the most racially explosive town of the Civil Rights Movement—Birmingham, Alabama. It's about two parents who defied discrimination, stood against injustice, clung to their faith, rose above all expectations, and raised their child to follow the Lord they themselves served. They believed wholeheartedly that she was a gift from God born for such a time as this and that he had a special plan and a purpose for her life—a plan for good, and not for evil, a plan to give her a hope and a future—all this despite what the world dictated to them through hatred and prejudice that hovered over them without a hint of mercy.

THE BIRTH OF A LEADER

Condoleezza was born at 11:30 A.M. on November 14, 1954, nine months to the day after her parents were married. According to her relatives, she was not given a middle name because “with a first name like Condoleezza, you don't need a middle one.” Her name is a twist on an Italian musical term (*con dolcezza*) that instructs the musician to play softly or literally “with sweetness.” It's a prophecy of sorts for those who know her best, whether she's playing the piano or intervening and advocating for peace in the Middle East.

The year of Condi's birth was a year of promise for the black race in the United States. It was the year that the Supreme Court declared “separate but equal” schools unconstitutional, assuring minorities that a change for the better was in the air. Black Americans had worked hard up to this point, diligently striving for democracy in a nation that was founded on the belief that all men

were created equal but up to that point hadn't stood by its own words. Still, the strides that had been made for equal rights in the years that preceded Condoleezza's birth helped pave the way for the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which integrated schools throughout America.

One of the most significant events in United States history that helped prepare the change for liberation occurred in 1831 when Nat Turner led black slaves in a revolt against the oppression of white slave owners. Thirty-two years later, in 1863, President Lincoln, a slave owner himself, issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves. Three years later the Civil Rights Act provided every citizen, regardless of race, sex, or religious beliefs, with full rights and privileges of citizenship under the U.S. Constitution. As a result of these changes, an outpouring of black culture, literature, music, and drama infiltrated America with the surety that all things were possible for those who believed it to be so.

As a result of these foundational steps as well as multiple others that preceded and succeeded them, approximately six months before Condi was born, the Supreme Court ordered public schools to desegregate. The revolutionary case of *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine, which dated back to 1896. The day of the ruling became known as Black Monday.¹

Although the fight against segregation gained strength for African-Americans, the harder blacks pushed for freedom, the more their adversaries pushed back in resistance, using violence to preserve their unjust desires for segregation. When Condi wasn't even a month old, twelve hundred white men gathered in Selma, Alabama to attend the first mass meeting of the newly organized White Citizens Council to protest school segregation. They vowed to do whatever it took to keep the black race separate from what they viewed as the superior white race.

Many blacks, empowered for the first time in hundreds of years by desegregation, began to strive for an education, to attain a profession outside of the plantation where they had been working for

their white masters, and to have a family of their own to raise—not to give to their owners as their property to work the fields. White supremacists continued to fight the liberation, further oppressing blacks, continuing to take what wasn't theirs, and using force and intimidation to keep blacks in bondage.

As a result, on both sides of her family Condi (as she prefers to be called) is descended from white slave owners who preyed on immoral and illegal sexual “rights” to their black slaves. Although it was not unusual in that day and time for slave owners to rape or engage in sexual relations with their slave women, the frequent brutality of the act further enslaved, intimidated, and bred inferiority.

In Condi's black heritage, the slaves were mostly house slaves rather than field slaves, and while this gave her great- and great-great-grandparents proximity to privilege, including some education, it was under the iron clasp of oppression and slavery that they attained or used it.

Most black slaves were given the opportunity to attend their church of faith on the Sabbath, which quickly became an educational warehouse for many where they learned to read, write, and expand their knowledge of their Constitutional and God-given rights as Americans and human beings in general. The more they learned, the more they realized that white men had the upper hand as long as they stayed ignorant of their rights, unable to read and write, and excluded from attaining a good profession and saving money. In short, their lack of education and knowledge kept them in bondage to the white man. So blacks' goals quickly became to get as educated as they could and to prepare their children from birth to do the same.

The newfound “freedom” that blacks were experiencing stimulated them to want to get high school diplomas and attend college, and as a result many black colleges were founded. What they didn't know was that while laws were being passed allotting them freedom, they would have to literally rip their liberation away from white-knuckled racists who would adamantly resist their attaining

it. Hindsight reveals that America was talking out of both sides of her mouth. On one side she proclaimed, “We the people,” offering equal rights; but on the other side she demanded “separate but equal,” an oxymoron at best. The contradiction was passionately challenged by blacks—either the Constitution was for every man, woman, and child, regardless of race or gender, or not for anyone. For Condoleezza and her family, this is where blatant defiance and confrontation against the system began—with two men she refers to as her heroes—her grandfathers.

A HISTORY OF EDUCATION

The unspoken attitude among black family members seemed to be that the battle against racism wasn’t only about what whites were doing to blacks, but what they themselves were or weren’t doing for themselves. Thus black parents and grandparents became motivated to do all they could do to educate their lineage in ways of which they themselves had remained in ignorance. As a result Condi’s grandparents, specifically her grandfathers, worked diligently to prepare the way for her parents and, indirectly, her.

Condoleezza’s Granddaddy Rice (as she calls him), John Wesley Rice, Sr., had been one of nine children born to house slaves in Eutaw, Alabama, eighty-nine miles southwest of Birmingham. Unlike some of their relatives and friends, who had been field slaves who worked their master’s crops from sunrise to sunset, sometimes for eighteen hours a day, they lived more comfortably and were sometimes given “benefits” such as the family’s used clothing and a limited education.

Granddaddy Rice hated racism and the inferiority that it bred in the black race. A man of faith in the Methodist denomination, he knew it was not God’s will or plan for blacks to be treated as inferior to any other race. He vowed to break free from the confines of racism and to help others do the same.

After leaving home as a young man, Granddaddy Rice became a sharecropper on his own land. He didn’t make much money—barely

enough to get by—but at least he was free, unlike his parents and grandparents before him. A burning desire within him longed for an education in biblical studies. For generations, under the strictest confines of slavery in the harshest conditions, his forefathers had relied on the promises in the Bible and the strength through adversity that came with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Now he wanted to learn everything he could about God’s Word so he could share the internal liberation that he himself experienced with other African-Americans who didn’t know about the freedom found in Christ.

One day in 1918 he asked someone passing by where a colored man could go to school to get “book learning.” He was informed that there was a small Presbyterian school about thirty-seven miles north of Eutaw in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, called Stillman College. It was a small, white-run seminary that specifically trained black men as Presbyterian ministers. So the elder Rice began to persevere and save cotton from the fields that he toiled in every day so he could pay for his education. When he finally made it to Stillman and had finished his first year, he realized that he had no way to pay for the remainder of his schooling. He inquisitively asked how the other young men were paying for their education, and he was told that they had received scholarships that paid for all of their schooling by agreeing to be trained to be Presbyterian pastors. School administrators told him that if he wanted to become a Presbyterian minister, he too could have a scholarship. He agreed, assuring them that attaining biblical knowledge to share with others was exactly what he had intended on doing in the first place. He got his degree in 1920 and was sent to plant an African-American church in Birmingham called Westminster Presbyterian Church.

After the church was up and running, Granddaddy Rice made it a personal mission from God to help the parents in the church send their children to college, particularly Stillman College. According to Condi’s family, every year until his death he traveled to the Stillman campus by bus (he never owned a car) to advocate for students

whose unpaid tuition bills otherwise would have disqualified them from taking finals and graduating. And every year students who would not have otherwise taken their finals because of a lack of finances did so with his intervention. Unfortunately, although Condi would learn to understand how her grandfather helped prepare the way for her own education, she never got to know him personally. He died two years before she was born.

“What my grandfather understood, and what I experienced years later, is the transforming power of education. And just as education transforms individuals, one by one, it can transform whole societies. Education is, as the American philosopher John Dewey believed, ‘the fundamental method of social progress and reform.’”²

Condi’s Granddaddy Rice was known for his passion for two things—education and Jesus Christ, both of which had liberated him. His picture hangs neatly in the midsized church today, and members say he was known for walking throughout the neighborhood personally inviting people to attend his church and share in the joy of salvation. He was a people person and spent hours visiting and encouraging his congregation. He saw it as his mission to evangelize as he emphasized freedom through Christ and education to anyone with a listening ear.

Condi’s maternal grandfather, Albert Robinson Ray III or “Granddaddy Ray” as she prefers, was equally as impressive in his determination and perseverance. He was the son of a white plantation owner and a favored black servant from an educated family. Two maternal aunts were among the first nursing graduates from Tuskegee Medical Institute, founded by Booker T. Washington, who had a vision similar to that of Condi’s ancestors—progress through education, self-reliance, and patience.³

In rebellion against segregation and degradation, Albert Ray ran away from home when he was thirteen years old with nothing but a railroad token in his pocket. He later married and had five children, settling down in Birmingham. At that time Birmingham

was referred to as the Promised City for blacks, as it was the back-breaking labor of blacks that had fueled the progress and growth of the city when it originated in 1870. While other black kids were being raised to work for white families in order to financially assist their own families, Albert's children were forbidden to do so. He refused to allow the segregation to affect his family and stood against it in every way possible, including not allowing his children to drink from "colored" fountains or to use "colored" restrooms. Instead he encouraged his children to wait and use the facilities at home—or not at all. To succumb to using "colored" accommodations or to sit at the back of the bus was to submit to inferiority, and that was something the Rays just didn't do.

Angelena's brother Alto says he never got on a segregated bus in his life. "Daddy told us, 'Wait till you get home to drink. Wait till you get home to go to the bathroom.' If you had to go in the back door, we just wouldn't go."⁴

To properly care for his family, Granddaddy Ray worked two jobs during the week as a mining contractor and a blacksmith, and on Saturdays he built houses for extra money in the most segregated part of Birmingham. He was determined that his children would never work in the mines like he did. He had a reputation for two things—doing good work and not working on the Sabbath.

On Sundays Granddaddy Ray and his family spent the greater part of the day praising God and thanking him for their blessed life. In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Granddaddy Ray was a trustee, a job he took seriously. Not only was he active in the church, but he was the spiritual leader of his family, a role that was even more important to him. As a family, the Rays prayed and read the Bible together on a daily basis. Again and again he told his children that segregation and racism was not about them but about man's desire to control and limit another person. It was an issue that had been around from the beginning of time, something the Bible itself advocated against. He also told them not to submit to the confines

of intolerance in any way. It was not the Ray thing to do, or God's desire for his children.

Apart from faith in God, he also had a passion for education, seeing the collaboration of the two as a way to further liberate his children and future grandchildren. As a result he and his wife worked hard to put all five of their children through college. Eventually, as they grew into adults, he built homes for his children.

"I think that black Americans of my grandparents' ilk had liberated themselves," Condi says. "They had broken the code. They had figured out how to make an extraordinary comfortable and fulfilling life despite the circumstances. They did not feel that they were captives."⁵ She also says, "One of my favorite quotes from Thomas Jefferson is: 'The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.'"

Although Condi refers to her grandfathers as two of her favorite heroes because of their ability to overcome circumstances, the character traits of ambition and perseverance are part of her heritage that expands beyond those men. Condi says that one family member, a slave, taught herself how to read, others scrimped money together to buy books to educate themselves, and another adamantly pursued parish ministry in the Methodist denomination. There was great pride and determination in both the Ray and Rice heritage. Condi recalls her Grandma Ray continually telling her and her cousins to never forget that they were Rays, a reminder to stand tall, be proud, and demonstrate integrity in all they said and did.

Condi's maternal great-grandmother made a name for herself as well. Raised in Dolomite, a suburb in North Birmingham, Alabama, she was raised in the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) denomination, which changed to Christian Methodist Episcopal after integration and eventually became St. Paul's Christian Methodist Episcopal Chapel. She made a living by sewing for people and would often sew clothes for her granddaughters, one of which was Condi's mother, Angelena. Ang, as those who knew her best called her, and her older sister, Mattie, wearing their grandmother's hand-

sewed dresses, would one day be used as models for a calendar, earning them the nickname Poster-Girls by friends in the community. Condi's great-grandmother's homemade dresses made their way into many homes, and some of Birmingham's elite sought her out for her sewing ability.

Interestingly enough, most of Condi's family members and forefathers were exceedingly successful in whatever they put their hand to. They were determined, hard-working, persevering, patient, and brimming with faith in God.

Aside from the contention that existed in the 1950s for black Americans to gain equal rights, another important movement and change was in effect—women's rights. Condoleezza's birth occurred during a decade of change for women. Despite the leaps and bounds occurring, women were still imprisoned by the tyranny of the government through unequal laws. The unrighteous, enslaving laws were even worse for black women. Without intervention some of those laws would not have enabled Condoleezza to go to college, vote, or retain a position in the upper echelons of government.

Although the movement by women to achieve full civil rights in America began in 1848 and had a good hundred years of success behind it by the time Condi was born, the residual effects of seven generations of beliefs that women were inferior to men continued to permeate the fifties and sixties. Although staggering changes were evident, there were areas of a woman's life that still needed to be liberated, specifically when it came to family life, religion, government, employment, and education. Regardless of the laws that had changed, within the hearts and minds of many people, predominantly males, there remained an attitude of superiority, and that was something laws couldn't change. As a result women would still have to fight to have equal wages in the workforce, be treated equally in regard to value, gain extended education, and overcome the inferiority that had been oppressing them their entire lives.

Given the cultural wars of racism and the ongoing battle for women's rights, it would have seemed implausible to imagine

that a black, female child born in the heat of the battles at hand and the aftermath that has continued since would rise above the ruins to be a champion of sorts, not only for a nation but for a world. On January 25, 2005 United States Senator Joe Lieberman (Connecticut), in his statement on the nomination of Condoleezza Rice for Secretary of State, said:

Let us speak directly. Dr. Rice, born in 1954 in the then racially segregated South, knew the sting of bigotry. No one on the day of her birth could have rationally predicted that she would grow up to be the Secretary of State of the United States of America. But she was blessed with great natural abilities, with a strong family, with an abiding faith in God.

God had prepared a life for Condoleezza Rice from the beginning of time and was orchestrating the dynamics of a universe to fulfill that calling. It included a plan that no one could overcome with bigotry, racism, or discrimination. He knew generations before she was born that her ancestors would fulfill their life plan and endure grave heartache and suffering in their attempt to pave the way of liberation, so she could fulfill his plans in her life. Her forefathers knew their hard work and determination would reap reward somewhere down the line, if not eternally. So they raised their children in liberty with the same recipe for success they had followed: faith, family, and education.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1: A STORY OF PREJUDICE AND PROMISE

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3. "Lessons of Might and Right," *Washington Post*, September 10, 2001.
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CHAPTER 2: A LOVE STORY

1. "Condi: The Girl Who Cracked the Ice," *The Sunday Times*, November 21, 2004.
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CHAPTER 3: RAISED IN THE WAR ZONE

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10. Montgomery, *Were It Not for Grace*, p. 9.
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