

November 30, 2004

Next President of the United States?

Hilary: NO! Condi: POSSIBLY!

by Fr. Stephen Lynch, OFM

In August of 2004 *Forbes Magazine* named Condoleezza Rice the world's most powerful woman. Here's a little known, but plausible scenario as to her possible future candidacy for President of the United States. Should Cheney have to resign or die in office, Bush could appoint Condi as his new Vice-President. In that case, 2008 would see Condi Rice as the front runner for the Republican Party's presidential candidate.

Who is Condi Rice?

She is single at age 50, and has never been married. She laments she has no private life. However, former San Francisco 49ers star Gene Washington, serves as a sometime escort at official functions. Rice doesn't think her career has hampered her personal life. "I'm not married, but I never met anybody I wanted to live with," she says. "I think I've maintained balance in my life. I'm not a workaholic; I'm pretty relaxed about things. I went back to playing the piano seriously four years ago. I exercise a lot and go to sporting events." She is a big sports fan.

A Democrat until 1982, Condi is a fitness buff who likes to unwind by working out to music by heavy-metal legends Led Zeppelin, according to *People magazine*. She wakes up at 5 a.m. and hits the treadmill right away. She loves to shop. "On a Sunday, don't be surprised if you see me at one of the malls in Washington, D.C.," she once told *Glamour magazine*. She began playing piano at age 3. While in high school, she was a competitive ice skater. She speaks Russian, French and Spanish. She loves to serve up Southern cuisine, and is a master at seafood gumbo and fried chicken. She says she can fall asleep just about anywhere — even once in a helicopter flying over the Gaza Strip. In February 2001, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told reporters he was distracted the first time he met her. "I have to confess, it was hard for me to concentrate in the conversation with Condoleezza Rice because she has such nice legs."

Known as "Condi" to her friends, she was born in the extremely segregated Birmingham, Alabama, of the 1950s. She was the only child to her parents, Angelena Rice and Reverend John Wesley Rice, Jr., both of whom were originally from Jamaica. Her university professor father was the pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church, and her mother was a music teacher. Ms Rice was born in 1954 under the shadow of segregation the same year as the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Condi was nine when her schoolmate Denise McNair was killed in the bombing of the Black Sixteenth Street Baptist Church by white supremacists on September 15, 1963. Condi wasn't even 10 when the town became the epicenter of the civil rights movement in 1963. "It was a very tough and violent year and there were a lot of days we didn't go to school," she says. She has often said that her childhood during segregation taught her determination against adversity, and the need to be "twice as good" as non-minorities to get ahead. Her childhood chiseled her strong determination and self-respect.

In an interview with Newsweek magazine, Rice said that despite growing up with racial segregation, personal expectations were high. "My parents had me absolutely convinced that, well, you may not be able to have a hamburger at Woolworth's, but you can be president of the United States." Rice's belief in education and self-improvement seem to be the key to understanding her.

Education

Taught by her parents that education provided armour against segregation and prejudice, Ms Rice worked her way to college by the age of 15. In 1968, the family moved to Denver. In her Roman Catholic high school, young Condi, who had never had a white classmate before, was one of only three black students. As for her religion, she says she is a deeply religious evangelical Presbyterian.

She says her mother and father felt strongly about pushing ahead in education. She had lessons in everything-piano, skating, ballet, French . . ." She skipped first grade, and also the seventh. She studied one summer at the famous music camp in Aspen- "affirmative action for Colorado kids," she says. Aiming to become a pianist, Rice enrolled at the University of Denver at the age of 15, graduating at 19 with a bachelor's degree in political science (cum laude). Midway through college, however, she came to the sad realization that she would not "make it" as a pianist. She did not want to become an accompanist, and she did not want "to teach 13-year-olds to murder Beethoven." So she left the music program and cast about for a different major. First she tried English literature and "hated it": It was simply too "squishy." ("That'll get me in trouble with my humanist friends.") Next she tried government, but that, too, was "not very rigorous."

She earned a master's degree at the University of Notre Dame, and a doctorate from the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies. Both of her advanced degrees are also in political science. In 1993, she was named provost of Stanford University, the youngest person, first woman and first black to get the job. At that time, she told the San Francisco Chronicle the advice she'd give to President Bill Clinton about Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein: "He is an outlaw, but I would be careful about trying to do anything to act to overthrow him."

At the age of 26, Ms Rice became a fellow at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Arms Control.. and served as an assistant professor. She returned to Denver for her Ph.D. Eight years later, Scowcroft selected her for his NSC staff. While she was there, the new governor of California, Pete Wilson, considered appointing her to a U.S. Senate seat (which he himself had just vacated). She signaled to him, however, that she did not desire the appointment ("and I don't think I would have received it anyway"). If she had received and accepted it, she-not Carol Moseley-Braun, elected from Illinois in 1992- would have been the first black woman to serve in the Senate. As a Stanford professor, she was the favorite of many students -- her classes were often oversubscribed. She also won two of the university's highest teaching honors.

Her inspiration came from a course taught by Josef Korbel, a Czech refugee from Nazism and

Communism, who headed Denver's school of international relations. Korbelt was the father of the United States' first woman Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. "I really adored him," says Rice. "I really did. He's the reason I'm in this field of the study of the Soviet Union. I loved his course, and I loved him. He sort of picked me out as someone who might do this well." From then on, it was "Soviet politics, Soviet everything." Rice knew the young Albright, because she was a frequent guest in the Korbelt home. The two women turned out differently in their thinking-with Rice arguably closer to Korbelt's consistently tough-minded views-but America may well have the unusual experience of two successive secretaries of state who learned about the world at the same knee.

Business career

Rice has served on the board of directors for the Chevron Corporation, the Charles Schwab Corporation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the University of Notre Dame, the International Advisory Council of J.P. Morgan and the San Francisco Symphony Board of Governors. She was a Founding Board member of the Center for a New Generation, an educational support fund for schools in East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, and was Vice President of the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula. In addition, her past board service has encompassed such organizations as Transamerica Corporation, Hewlett Packard, the Carnegie Corporation, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Rand Corporation, the National Council for Soviet and East European Studies, the Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition and KQED, public broadcasting for San Francisco. She once had a Chevron oil tanker named after her when she served on the company's board of directors. After concerns that her name made the ship a more inviting terror target, the tanker was renamed Altair Voyager.

Soviet interest

Her love for Russia -- she speaks the language fluently -- dates back long before her trips to Moscow as a White House official. "There is something about certain cultures that you just take to," she says. "It's like love -- you can't explain why you fall in love. Culture is something you can adopt, and I have a great affinity for Russia. It certainly has nothing to do with my ethnic heritage."

She has an obvious personal affection for former President Bush, and a special affection for George W., since the time he was the governor of Texas. She has come to know George W. well and, by all accounts, the two get along famously. A Bush aide says that they vacation together; that they talk on the phone nearly every day; and that Bush trusts her completely. Rice says of George W., "I've never wanted somebody to be president so much. And it has nothing to do with me and my role, but with what he can do for the country."

Although she says she's "always taken life one step at a time", all her career moves seem to be leading to a prominent job -- perhaps all the way to president. After serving as the Soviet affairs adviser on Bush Senior's National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice returned to Stanford in 1991 and, in 1993, became the youngest, the first female and first non-white provost.

It is difficult to make generalizations about Condoleezza Rice. She was an African-American

National Security Adviser, but for a that won just 10% of the black vote. Condoleezza Rice is the first woman to occupy the key post of national security adviser, and now Secretary of State. She is the most academic member of the Bush foreign affairs team and - because of her gender, background and youth - one of the most distinctive. She is personally close to Mr. Bush, barely leaving his side during the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

Uncompromising positions

Ms Rice's influence over the administration's foreign policy strategy has been considerable. She holds uncompromising positions on missile defense, Russia and the environment. However, Ms Rice, like many in the administration, thinks of US foreign policy largely in terms of US national and strategic interest, and she is no fan of the US acting as a paternalistic nation-builder. Rice is a Council of Foreign Relations member, a National Endowment for the Humanities trustee, and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has written numerous articles and several books on international relations and foreign affairs. With her former White House colleague, Philip Zelikow, Rice co-authored what many experts call the best account of German unification, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*. (Harvard University Press, 1995)

Above all, Rice was influenced by people who understood the paradox of the Soviet Union—that it was essentially weak and rotting. Yet as weak and rotting as it was, she believes "it was still exceedingly dangerous, and I think we're very fortunate to have gotten through the Cold War the way we did." Asked by Time magazine who should be named "Person of the Century," she nominated Harry Truman, who "gave the U.S. an unprecedented role in international affairs" and "fundamentally reshaped the world and planted the seeds of the Soviet Union's eventual destruction." She calls John Foster Dulles "an extraordinarily important figure," one "I would love to have met." But philosophy and timing have to come together, and, if you think about it, what happened from 1981 to 1991 was essentially rollback [Dulles's supreme objective].

Perhaps the most powerful and visible national security adviser of recent years was Henry Kissinger, who started as national security adviser to Richard Nixon and then became his secretary of state. Rice comments, "I'm very fond of Henry Kissinger. I think he's one of the smartest people I've ever met. I'm probably a bit of a Realpolitiker in that I think that power balances determine a lot. But I think that I am not in the sense that I thought that detente was probably predicated too much on the notion of the Soviet Union as a normal state, which had its interests in the international system that could somehow be accommodated. I think the Soviets simply took that as an opportunity to expand. I am a realist. Power matters. But there can be no absence of moral content in American foreign policy, and, furthermore, the American people wouldn't accept such an absence. Europeans giggle at this and say we're naive and so on, but we're not Europeans, we're Americans—and we have moral values."

Some profiles of Rice describe her as precise and prissy. She has stated several times in interviews that she has aspirations of becoming the Commissioner of the National Football League. Condoleezza Rice still dreams of becoming a concert pianist. With President Bush looking on, his National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice performed Brahms' Violin Sonata

in D minor with cellist Yo-Yo Ma at Constitution Hall in April 2002. The occasion was the annual presentation ceremony of the National Medals of Arts and National Humanities Medals. Ma was one of the 16 honorees. At the end of the presentations, Ma and Rice - who began playing the piano at age three - brought the house down and the audience to its feet with their performance. Afterwards, Rice was given a congratulatory kiss by the president.

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