

Leadership and Legacy of General Colin Powell

Posted on October 24, 2019

Colin Powell's Leadership and Public Legacy

Colin Powell is a person who served the American people in a significant way and accomplished more than anyone would have thought. He remains an influential and significant person in America. He is a man driven by determination. Having grown up in a poverty-stricken area, he grew to become a man who would advise the president as an adult. He has also overcome immense challenges in his life. His bold and admirable personality adds flavor to the situations he is caught up in, yet perseverance leads him to the road he chose. Success is always within his reach, and the sky remains his limit despite the surrounding circumstances being uncontrollable. Colin Powell is a significant asset to the US.

Family Background Education and Early Character

Powell was born on 5 April 1957 to parents who were Jamaican immigrants, Luther and Arie. He was born in New York. Powell grew up in a Jamaican city together with his parents and relatives. He was a respectful and obedient child who always followed his parents' wishes. Having come from a neighborhood with diverse personalities, Powell learned the art of respecting others and reverence for all persons, whoever they may be (PR, 2017). His military career started when he was still a student at New York City College. After studying geology, and in 1958 he gained the rank of 2nd lieutenant. In 1958, he gained the rank of 1st lieutenant, 1959 became a captain, in 1962, he became a major, 1966 Lieutenant Colonel, 1970 Colonel, 1976, a Brigadier General and major general 1983. By 1989, he was a General. Such a consistent rise can only be achieved through hard work, diplomacy, and distinguished service.

Military Mentors and Professional Formation

Powell was inspired by great people who he met along the way. For instance, General Henry "Gunfighter Emerson" was a great friend of his. Powell felt that the General inspired him for "his great love of his soldiers and concern for their welfare" (Gibbs & Duffy, 1995). This kind of regard towards his fellow soldiers is what attracted Powell to the military career. Among the 16,000 military advisors who were deployed to Vietnam, Powell was one of them as the 2nd lieutenant in the army. It was during that time that he sustained his first injury after stepping on a Punji-stick booby trap. This earned him a purple heart and a star made of bronze. He got injured again in the same country when

his helicopter crashed. "single-handedly, he rescued several army men from the burning helicopter, among them being Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys, who is the commander of the American Division (Gibbs & Duffy, 1995).

Rise in Military and Diplomatic Leadership

Powel became a significant personality both in the military and diplomatic undertakings after Vietnam. It was after he earned an MBA from George Washington University that the White House Fellowship (1970), together with figures like Casper Weinberger and Powell, where he left lasting impressions. He would continue serving in leadership positions as well as studied at Army War College, earning him experience that saw him advise both Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger on the Granada Invasion and President Reagan on the meetings with the president of the Soviet Union- Gorbachev. Powel's highest military position was Chairman of the Joint Chief, which lasted from 1st October 1989 to 30th September 1993. during his reign, he oversaw a total of 28 crises, including Operation Desert September (1991). When Powel retired, that marked the end of his distinguished service in the military; however, he remains a respected General with four stars and a diplomat whose inclusion contributed to the realization of President Carter's peace mission to Haiti in 1994.

Controversies and Career Challenges

However, his career in the military has not been devoid of challenges since he had been accused of "whitewashing" the situation of the infamous My Lai massacre in the Vietnam War. He also clashed with General John Hudacheck back in Colorado, although John's bad comments about Powell partaking in his leadership missed the mark since his record was speaking for itself. Another hard time in Powell's life was when he had to testify about the Iran-Contra affair since "he was one of only five persons in the Pentagon who knew about the operation." Despite having been involved in the arms selling deal with Iran for hostages' exchange, he was not implicated as having done wrong. Further, he publicly reacted strongly against President Clinton's plan to allow gay men and women to serve in the military back in the 1990s. However, he later accepted a compromise on the subject (Stephanopoulos, (2015).

Reputation Courage and the Reluctant Warrior

Despite the fact that there have been possible scandals that could have injured his reputation, Powell remains a highly-regarded militant. His controversy as a "reluctant Warrior" did not take away his good record of military service and bravery. He is renowned as a man who never advocated for military intervention when international disputes were involved as his first solution (Weinberger, 1990). His initial preferred solution has always been diplomacy and containment. Having been such a cautious person made him a hallmark of a professional in politics as well as his achievements.

Powell's Practical Leadership Philosophy

When conversing with the Atlantic writer P.J Rourke, he set the record straight about himself by saying "I'm different from most people in senior foreign policy circles, both in the United States and among my colleagues overseas, in that I'm not an academic and was not raised to be a foreign policy intellectual...I'm a practitioner, somebody who was raised to see a problem, analyze it, have views about it, and have passion for a solution. I tend to go with my experience. My experience is in the soldierly things" (Howorth, 2017). It is the combination of practicality and sincerity that marked Powell's career; even when he clashed with the "Hawks" over the need for war, his record of bravery as a soldier gave reliability to his diplomacy arguments.

References

Gibbs, N., & Duffy, M. (1995). General letdown. (Cover story). *Time*, 146(21), 48.

Howorth, C. (2017). Colin Powell. *Time*, 189(15), 8.

PR, N. (2017, May 31). General Colin Powell and Mrs. Alma Powell Receive INROADS Excellence in Leadership Award. *PR Newswire Us*.

Stephanopoulos, G. (2015). One On One With Colin Powell. *This Week (ABC)*, 1.

Weinberger, C. W. (1990, January 22). General Colin Powell-An Inside View. *Forbes*. P. 31.