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African American Advisors to Presidents

By [Melissa Ware](#)

In celebration of Black History Month, the Hauenstein Center compiled short biographies of outstanding African-American leaders whose lives have made significant contributions to American life. Their contributions were invaluable to American society and the American executive.

George Washington's Administration

+ **Benjamin Banneker**, or Bannekay, (1731-1806) was a man of extraordinary talents. He developed skills watch and clock making at a young age, whose impressive knowledge caught the attention of a Quaker surveyor. Joseph Ellicot, hired Banneker to make a specialized timepiece to make calculations and locations of the stars. Banneker was 58 when he began studying astronomy. Also an accomplished mathematician, Banneker was able to make the calculations to predict solar and lunar eclipses. A self-taught mathematician, astronomer, and clock and watch maker, Banneker began writing for the *Benjamin Banneker Almanac*. His writings under the pen-name "Sable Astronomer," were published in an anti-slavery publication from 1792-1797.



Under the direction of George Washington, with Pierre-Charles L'Enfant and Andrew Ellicott, Banneker surveyed a wilderness area approximately 100 sq. miles that is now the boundary of the District of Columbia.

Banneker's accomplishments did not go unnoticed by then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, with whom Banneker had begun correspondence. Banneker urged Jefferson, quoting his own words, to "extend [his] power and influence to the relief of every part of the human race, from whatever burden or oppression they may unjustly labor under..." Banneker included a plan for a new Department in the federal government. He suggested a Department of Peace to balance out the Department of War to prevent international conflicts. Thomas Jefferson took Banneker's writings and calculations along with his *Almanac* and sent them on to the French Academy of Sciences in Paris. His works were used in the British House of Commons.

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE](#)

Abraham Lincoln's Administration

+ **Frederick Douglass**, prominent abolitionist and skilled orator, was the 19th century's leading advocate and spokesman for the abolition of slavery and racial equality.



Douglass, born into slavery, was the son of a slave woman and an unknown white man. He saw his mother a handful of times before she died when he was only 7 years old. He was watched over by an aunt and grandmother before he was shipped off at the age of 8 to live with Hugh Auld, a ship carpenter. It was there Douglass learned to read and write.

He lived in Baltimore for some time, before being shipped off to a notorious "slave breaker" named Edward Covey. After suffering brutal treatment, hunger, and daily whippings, Douglass resolved himself to becoming a free man. He was jailed in 1936 after a plan to escape was discovered. He was finally successful in 1838: he arrived with his wife from Baltimore in New York City a free man. He and his wife traveled to Massachusetts and settled in New Bedford.

Once settled in New Bedford, Douglass continued his reading and studying. He joined many organizations and attended abolitionists' meetings. Author of the journal the *Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, impressed with Douglass' abilities, was encouraged to speak at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's annual convention. Douglass' profundity and "eloquence" pronounced him as a leader and skilled orator.

Douglass began publishing his various works, including his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* in 1845. Shortly thereafter, Douglass began the first publication of the *North Star*, a weekly abolitionist paper.

Douglass and Garrison's (long-time colleagues in the fight for abolition), began to diverge, as Douglass began lobbying Abraham Lincoln for the end of slavery, and advised Lincoln during the Civil War. He convinced Lincoln to organize two black regiments from Massachusetts. During the war, he helped recruit soldiers for the Northern Army. He was a staunch advocate of social justice, an effective leader, and an African-American pioneer.

A mere look, word, or motion -- a mistake, accident, or want of power -- are all matters for which a slave may be whipped at any time. Does a slave look dissatisfied? It is said, he has the devil in him, and it must be whipped out. Does he speak loudly when spoken to by his master? Then he is getting high-minded, and should be taken down a button-hole lower. Does he forget to pull off his hat at the approach of a white person? Then he is wanting in reverence, and should be whipped for it. Does he ever venture to vindicate his conduct, when censured for it? Then he is guilty of impudence, -- one of the greatest crimes of which a slave can be guilty. Does he ever venture to suggest a different mode of doing things from that pointed out by his master? He is indeed presumptuous and getting above himself...

Source: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (3rd. English ed., Leeds, 1846)

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE](#); [THE FREDERICK DOUGLASS PAPERS](#)

Theodore Roosevelt's Administration

+ **Booker T. Washington**, son of a white father and slave mother, was born into slavery in 1856 on a farm in Virginia. Shortly thereafter, in 1865, when the Emancipation Proclamation was announced, and the slaves in southwestern Virginia were freed, Booker and his siblings moved to Malden, West Virginia. He worked as a salt packer, coal-miner and eventually a houseboy, where he was encouraged to read and write.



He enrolled in the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, created specifically for the training of black teachers. After completing his studies at Hampton, he went on to Seminary in D.C. He returned to Hampton to teach, and was recommended by Hampton leadership to become principal of a new school in Alabama.

In 1881, at the young age of 25, Booker T. Washington became Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute's first principal. Under Washington's leadership, Tuskegee became a model for his views on civil rights. Washington thought that for blacks achieving equal rights in American society was a gradual, incremental process, and through commercial, agricultural, industrial and educational endeavors, African Americans would achieve acceptance from white Americans. He felt that blacks should not ask for too much so soon after emancipation, causing rifts between him and African-American leader W.E.B. DuBois. Washington used his status among whites to secure funding from white, wealthy men and women to fund schools and projects for African Americans. Among the many relationships developed was one with President

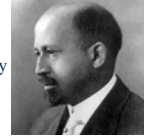
Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt invited Washington to the White House to dine with him, enraging many southerners. Washington was a prolific author, whose many essays and autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, have made significant contributions to American society.

As is inscribed in a memorial to Washington at Tuskegee University, "He lifted the veil of ignorance from his people and pointed the way to progress through education and industry."

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE](#)

Woodrow Wilson's Administration

+ **W.E.B. Du Bois**, a man whose greatness of life and works is difficult to encapsulate in a few mere paragraphs, was a prominent and civil rights leader, educator, author, poet, historian, activist, and scholar.



Du Bois, born in 1868, was not akin to the ravages of slavery as was his counterpart Booker T. Washington. During his early and formative years, he lived with his mother, Mary, where he was generally accepted by his white community members of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He was highly motivated and academically talented. He excelled in school, and was encouraged (despite his skin color) to continue with his education. Forever conscious of the divide that separated him from his white classmates, Du Bois vowed never to accept the subordinate role that others relegated him to because of his skin color, and vowed to use his talents to make positive change.

He went on to graduate from Fisk University in 1888, and a degree from Harvard in 1890. Shortly thereafter he left to study in Berlin and spent much of his time traveling through Europe and studying with European social scientists. He returned to the U.S., and in 1896, became the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. Throughout his time in higher education, Du Bois was establishing himself as a prolific writer, scholar, historian and social scientist.

Among his many writings include: *The Philadelphia Negro* (1896), *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), *John Brown* (1909), *Black Reconstruction* (1935), *Black Folk, Then and Now* (1939), and *The Negro* (1915). He is the founder of the Niagara Movement in 1905 with William Trotter, and co-founder of the NAACP in 1909. He was a regular contributor to many newspapers and journals, served as editor of the NAACP publication *The Crisis*, and also considered by many to be "The Father of Pan-Africanism" in his study of the African Diaspora.

Du Bois initially supported the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912, and the entry into World War I, was a member of the American press delegation to the peace talks in Paris, and met with Wilson's advisor, Colonel House to hold a Pan African Conference.

Du Bois is quoted saying Wilson "was by birth... unfitted for largesse of view or depth of feeling about racial injustice." Taken from PBS-American Experience: Woodrow Wilson-A Portrait.

Du Bois' activism for African-Americans at home and abroad, his interest and involvement in political systems such as socialism and Communism made him a target of an FBI investigation. He ran for the U.S. Senate in 1950 in New York, and was unsuccessful. He was influential at home and abroad, a signer of the Stockholm Peace Pledge, received the Lenin Peace Prize in 1959, and frequently spoke on Japanese policy in China and Russia. He was invited to Ghana in 1961 by the President, Kwame Nkrumah, and eventually became a dual citizen of both Ghana and the United States.

Not only was Du Bois one of the most influential and celebrated black leaders of the 20th century, he was one of the greatest leaders and activists in American history. His life is certainly worthy of study by all walks of life.

Franklin Roosevelt's Administration

+ **Asa Philip Randolph**, born in Crescent City, FL., in 1889, left his boyhood home in Jacksonville to pursue acting in New York, but ended up a U.S. labor leader, activist, and presidential advisor.



Randolph enrolled in City College of New York to study politics and economics. He and a fellow classmate at Columbia University in New York formed the magazine, *The Messenger*, in 1917. The actions of a major employer of numerous African-Americans, the Pullman Company, sparked Randolph to organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925 in an attempt to form a labor union for the employees. Under the leadership of Randolph and years of struggle, the Pullman Company and the Brotherhood finally agreed to a contract in 1937.

As a proven activist, Randolph became one of the most prominent advocates of civil rights. He organized to put pressure on President Roosevelt to pass the Fair Employment Act, and formed the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service in 1947. His actions put pressure on President Harry Truman to desegregate the armed forces in 1948.

During the Eisenhower administration, Randolph, Roy Wilkins (NAACP) and Arnold Aronson formed the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Since its founding in 1957, the LCCR has taken the lead on civil rights law and legislation campaigns. Randolph and others emerged in the 50s and 60s to lead the fight for civil rights through the March on Washington and advisory roles with the President Johnson.

He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964 by Lyndon Johnson.

[INFOPLEASE BIO: WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION ARTICLE](#)

+ **Mary McLeod Bethune**, one of 17 children, rose to become one of America's leading ladies in education. After attending Scotia Seminary and Moody Bible Institute, she started a school of her own with \$1.50 and five students. This school, the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls, was expanded into a high school, junior college, and ultimately the Bethune-Cookman College.

She founded the National Council of Negro Women, and was asked to be a special advisor to FDR on minority affairs and the New Deal. She was later appointed Director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration.

President Harry Truman sent McLeod-Bethune along with W.E.B. Du Bois and Walter White to the organizing meeting of the United Nations. Truman also sent Bethune to Liberia as a U.S. representative to the inauguration of Liberian President William V.S. Tubman.

One of the members of McLeod's NCNW, was Dorothy Height, who had been pursuing a Master's degree in Psychology at New York University. Ms. Height began working as a caseworker in New York City's Welfare Department. She joined the national staff of the YMCA in 1944.

She distinguished herself as a staunch advocate for civil rights, developing programs and assuming the presidency of the National Council for Negro Women. She was frequently called on for counsel by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson. Dr. Height helped organize and coordinate numerous civil rights efforts, working with Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and A. Phillip Randolph.

She has received numerous awards and recognition for her work; the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Freedom

From Want Award, and the Spingarn Medal from the NAACP. She is a member of the National Women's Hall of Fame. More recently, Height was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President George W. Bush. On September 7, 2004, Dr. Height was inducted into the Democracy Hall of Fame International.

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE](#)

+ **Ralph Bunche**, a distinguished educator, civil rights activist, and leader, who served in numerous international capacities with the United Nations. Dr. Bunche received his doctorate from Harvard, conducted research in anthropology in the U.S., England, and Africa. Dr. Bunche was the chair of Political Science at Howard University, New York City Board of Education member, trustee of numerous universities, co-directed the Institute of Race Relations at Swarthmore, consulted President Franklin Roosevelt, and turned down a position of assistant Secretary of State by President Truman due to the poor, segregated housing conditions in Washington. Dr. Bunche's accomplishments do not stop there; he helped organize the March on Washington in 1963, and worked closely with the NAACP and Urban League. He is an extensive writer and scholar on race relations, politics and social systems.

He has contributed to the U.S. Department of State, Office of Strategic Services, the ILO, and the United Nations since 1946 as an advisor, analyst, mediator, undersecretary and secretary. He worked the confrontation between Arabs and Jews in Palestine from 1947-1949, and became the chief negotiator during the Arab-Israeli conflict during 1948. Dr. Bunche was also placed on diplomatic missions to the African Congo, Cyprus, Kashmir, and Yemen. Dr. Bunche was awarded over 30 honorary degrees between 1949 and 1952. He was given the NAACP Spingarn Award in 1949, and one year later was the 1950 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE; NOBEL PRIZE BIO](#)

+ **Pauli Murray**, another outstanding individual, has been lauded for her contributions as a writer, poet, lawyer, priest, and activist. She received degrees from Hunter College, and Howard University, and the University of California at Berkeley, and tutored law students at Yale. Pauli Murray was the first African American awarded a Doctor of Judicial Science (J.S.D.) from Yale. She was denied admission to the law school at the University of North Carolina and Harvard University because of her race and gender, respectively.

As a result, Pauli Murray dedicated her life to activism and social justice to eliminate racism and sexism in the public sphere. Her many accomplishments include a career as a distinguished civil rights lawyer, professor, college VP, and deputy attorney general of California. She is a founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and became the first African American woman to become an Episcopalian priest in 1977.

She worked to overcome barriers for women and African Americans living under Jim Crow and segregation under FDR and JFK.

[STANFORD BIO](#)

+ **Walter White**, a man whose noble works focused on improving conditions for African Americans, was an important civil rights leader during the early twentieth century. White, started the Atlanta, GA branch of the NAACP, and went on to rise among the ranks, serving as assistant secretary, and then executive secretary by 1931.

As executive secretary, he devoted himself to fight for anti-lynching legislation, fair voting practices, and desegregation in education, housing and the armed forces. He and A. Philip Randolph convinced FDR to prohibit discrimination in the defense industries through and Executive Order, and establish the Fair Employment Practices Commission.

He was a skillful writer and author of numerous books, one which influenced Truman to issue the order to desegregate the armed forces, and appoint a presidential committee on civil rights. He worked closely with Eleanor Roosevelt as joint members of the NAACP.

Additionally, he was a delegate to the Second Pan-African Conference in 1921, and was a delegate to the founding conference of the United Nations in 1945, and the General Assembly in Paris. He served as the executive secretary of the NAACP until his death in 1955.

[GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY BIO](#)

Harry Truman's Administration

SEE: Asa Phillip Randolph

Dwight Eisenhower's Administration

+ **Dorothy Height**, a social activist and 40-year president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), advised President Eisenhower on the desegregation of schools.

[NCNW BIO](#)

+ **Cora M. Brown**, another Eisenhower supporter, began her education in Michigan during her formative years. She received degrees from Fisk University and Wayne State University in Michigan. After working for some time as a social worker, she began pursuing her political aspirations when she decided to run for the Michigan State Senate. She was defeated in 1950 but was successful in 1952. She served two terms in the second and third districts respectively. She switched parties after clashing with some of her Democratic colleagues on the issue of civil rights.



As a Republican, she supported Dwight Eisenhower's bid for president in 1956, and went on to serve a term as U.S. postmaster general after a margin of approximately 6,500 votes prevented her from becoming the first black female congresswoman.

[AAR BIO](#)

+ **E. Frederic Morrow**, a New Jersey native, is another distinguished African American who achieved many "firsts" in American history. He received a law degree from Rutgers University, and went to work for the NAACP. Shortly thereafter he joined the U.S. Army and fought in WWII. Upon his return, he began working as a writer for CBS, before joining the Eisenhower campaign.

After Eisenhower was elected, he was an advisor to the Department of Commerce, before Eisenhower appointed him Administrative Officer for Special Projects, where he served as the first African American to hold an executive position in the U.S. government. He held this position from 1955-1961.

After his work with the Eisenhower administration, he went on to become the first black vice president of the Bank of America. He continued his scholarship and published three books. [AAR BIO](#)

+ **J. Ernest Wilkins**, formerly a physicist on the Manhattan Project, was appointed assistant secretary of labor for international affairs by President Eisenhower.

[PRINCETON BIO](#)

John F. Kennedy's Administration

+ **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, one of the world's most prominent non-violent activist and advocate for social justice and

peace, Nobel Peace Laureate, ordained minister, and one of the world's greatest examples of leadership.

Dr. King began his life's works as minister of Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta, and left to answer a call at Dexter Avenue Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama. He returned to co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer and direct the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, of which he was founder and president from 1957-1968. He organized numerous marches and non-violent demonstrations in the name of civil rights, and was jailed over thirty times. He also held numerous leadership positions within the Baptist denomination.



Dr. King dedicated himself to striving for equality and justice for all mankind. He was an author of six books and numerous other articles and publications. Skilled orator, man of conscience and dignity, nobility and grace, he brought civil rights to the forefront of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He actively campaigned against the war in Vietnam, and for the rights of African Americans. He was tragically assassinated on April 4, 1968. The world mourned his passing.

There have been few such men as equal in stature to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and few who have done as much in the name of peace, freedom, and equality. For more information on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., see:

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE: MLK PAPERS PROJECT](#)

ALSO SEE: Dorothy Height, Thurgood Marshall, and Pauli Murray

Lyndon B. Johnson Administration

+ **Thurgood Marshall**, grandson of a slave, and denied access to University of Maryland Law School, he went on to receive his law degree from Howard University. Marshall's first major court case was to overturn a decision by the University of Maryland (who had previously denied Marshall admittance) who denied admittance to another young African American student. His success and hard work led him to New York, where he became the Chief Counsel for the NAACP.



Thurgood distinguished himself in practice, and was asked by the United Nations to help draft constitutions for the Ghana and Tanzania. He had won a plethora of Supreme Court cases challenging the constitutionality of discrimination, one of which was *Brown vs. Board of Education*, a landmark case. In 1954, President Kennedy appointed him to the U.S. Court of Appeals, Second Circuit.

In 1965, Lyndon Johnson appointed him to the office of U.S. Solicitor General, and subsequent nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967. He served as Associate Justice until his retirement. Thurgood Marshall won more Supreme Court cases than any other American in history.

[AMERICAN MEMORY ARTICLE](#)

+ **James Farmer**, another distinguished non-violent advocate, union organizer, and civil rights leader, who helped to co-found the civil rights group C.O.R.E., or Congress of Racial Equality, in Chicago in 1942. He helped to plan the March on Washington in 1963, and the "freedom rides" from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans.

Farmer was known as one of the "big six" of civil rights; Farmer, King, Dorothy Height, John Lewis, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young. After resignation from C.O.R.E. in 1966, he served as professor in numerous universities, and ran for a district seat in New York against Shirley Chisholm in 1968. He was unsuccessful in his bid for the House of Representatives, but President Nixon appointed him assistant secretary for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. He resigned one year later after differences with the Nixon administration.

He is the author of two books and numerous other articles and publications and is one of America's greatest advocates for civil rights.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

+ **Whitney Young**, presidential advisor, and executive director of the National Urban League, Young joins Farmer as one of America's most influential and prominent civil rights leader. Whitney Young received a degree in social work from the University of Nebraska, and after graduation went on the head of the Omaha Urban League.



He went east, and served as dean of social work at Atlanta University. Shortly thereafter he secured a Rockefeller Foundation grant that sent him on to Harvard. From there Young went on to join the NAACP, eventually working his way to state president.

He organized the 1963 march on Washington, and took over leadership of the National Urban League. As president, he started numerous programs and initiatives at the National Urban League, and grew the organization by leaps and bounds.

He was a close advisor to President Lyndon Johnson, and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Johnson. They eventually had a falling out over their opposing views on Vietnam. Tragically, Whitney Young drowned while swimming in Lagos, Nigeria.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

+ **Robert Clifton Weaver**, and American economist and government official, was appointed secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development by Johnson in 1966. He was America's first black cabinet member.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

+ **Roy Wilkins**, one of the most distinguished civil rights leaders, began his activism as a member of the NAACP. He took over editorship of *The Crisis*, the NAACP publication from W.E.B. DuBois in 1934, and rose to assistant secretary of the NAACP under Walter White. He became executive secretary (the highest position of leadership) for the NAACP after the death of Walter White.

He was one of the three founders of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, and organized and participated in various marches across the United States. He testified in numerous Congressional hearings, and advised Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Carter in his lifetime. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1967 by Lyndon Johnson.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

ALSO SEE: Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Height, Asa Philip Randolph

Richard Nixon's Administration

+ **Leon Sullivan**, minister, activist, entrepreneur, GM Board member, and presidential advisor began his career in the Baptist church at the age of 18. He attended Union Theological Seminary in New York City and later graduated from Columbia University with a Master's in Divinity. He served in a variety of ministerial roles of different congregations, and used his role in one of the largest churches in the U.S. to organize and lead around the cause of civil rights.

In Philadelphia, he organized a protest called "Selective Patronage" whose successes attracted the attention and involvement of Martin Luther

King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson.

He organized Opportunities Industrialization Centers and the Zion Improvement Association. He also started the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help and the 10-36 plan; a model to build a community economic base. His contributions and fund-raising in North Philadelphia landed him nationwide attention and a subsequent seat on the General Motors Board of Directors.

His economic models were incorporated into the United Nations as a means of divestment away from business in apartheid South Africa. These standards of human rights and responsible business were adopted worldwide as the Global Sullivan Principles.

His dedication for civil, economic and human rights around the world earned him the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George H.W. Bush in 1992, the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award by Bill Clinton and the Spingarn Medal by the NAACP and the Four Freedoms Award from the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, among many others. He is the author of five books and numerous honorary doctorates and degrees from colleges and universities. He advised Presidents Nixon and Ford on apartheid in South Africa.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

ALSO SEE: Dorothy Height

Gerald R. Ford's Administration

SEE: Dorothy Height, Leon Sullivan

Ronald Reagan's Administration

+ **Clarence Thomas**, the nation's second African American to hold a position in the U.S. Supreme Court held many positions throughout his career. He was Assistant Attorney General in Missouri, Legislative Assistant for U.S. Senator John Danforth.



During the Reagan administration, he became Assistant Secretary for Education for the Office of Civil Rights for one year, and in 1982 became Chairman of US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission until 1990. That same year, President George H.W. Bush appointed Thomas for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Upon the announcement of Thurgood Marshall's retirement, President Bush Sr. appointed him for the U.S. Supreme Court. Although many civil rights and women's organizations opposed Thomas' nomination, he was appointed by a Senate vote of 52-48.

His approach to the Court has been that of Antonin Scalia, an originalist.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

+ **Samuel Pierce**, a lawyer and politician served as secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) from 1981 to 1989.

[AAR BIO](#)

George H. W. Bush's Administration

+ **Colin Powell** served as the 65th Secretary of State under President George W. Bush, to become the first African American to serve in the fourth highest ranking position in the U.S. government. He is also the first African American to hold the highest military position in the Department of Defense. He is a four-star General, served as Ronald Reagan's National Security Advisor from 1987-1989, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1989-1993.



He has received numerous awards and commendations, including two Presidential Medals of Freedom, the Presidential Citizens Medal and the Congressional Gold Medal.

[WHITE HOUSE BIO](#)

ALSO SEE: Samuel Pierce, Condoleezza Rice, Clarence Thomas

William J. Clinton's Administration

+ **Jesse Jackson**, minister, civil rights activist, and presidential hopeful has made significant contributions to American life.

Jackson began his career as a Baptist minister, and worked alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. during the 60s. He worked full-time during the Civil Rights Movement. He was present on the balcony when Dr. King was assassinated. He worked with Rev. Leon Sullivan, and organized the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition in 1984.



He ran as a presidential candidate in 1984 and 1988, and although unsuccessful, he has contributed to advocate as an international diplomat, a hostage negotiator, advocated for public policy, and advised presidents. He was promoted to Special Envoy of the President and Secretary of State for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa by Bill Clinton and Madeline Albright. He is seen as a leader and a visionary in the African American community.

He is the author of two books and numerous articles, and co-authored another book with his son. He has received numerous awards and medals; including the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Bill Clinton and the NAACP Spingarn Medal. He has received honorary degrees and doctorates from a variety of Ivy League and other prestigious universities.

[RAINBOW COALITION BIO](#)

+ **Ron Brown**, former aide to Senator Edward Kennedy and Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign manager, was the first African American to serve as chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He served as secretary of commerce in President Clinton's administration from 1993 until his death in an airplane crash in 1996.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

+ **Vernon Jordan**, another close friend and advisor to President Clinton, was accused of helping cover-up the president's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Jordan was executive director of the United Negro College Fund and the National Urban League in the 1970s.

[INFOPLEASE BIO](#)

George W. Bush's Administration

+ **Condoleezza Rice** rose to prominence first as an outstanding scholar and university administrator, and executive officer in both Bush administrations. Ms. Rice is the first African American woman, and second woman to hold the position of

Secretary of State. She began her career as Assistant Professor of Political Science, Associate Professor, then Provost at Stanford University.



Her outstanding scholarship and expertise on the Soviet Union earned her Fellowship at the Hoover Institute and the Institute for International Studies. She has fellowships at numerous other prestigious academic institutions, and has received numerous honorary degrees and doctorates.

She serves on multiple boards of directors, until she left civilian life to work in the White House under George H.W. Bush as National Security Council, as Director, then Senior Director of Soviet and East European Affairs. She has served as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

In December of 2000, she was appointed as National Security Advisor, and after the retirement of Colin Powell prior to George W. Bush's second term, she was appointed in 2004 as the 66th Secretary of State and has since faced many challenges to national security.

[WHITE HOUSE BIO](#)

+ **Rod Paige** was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the 7th U.S. secretary of education on January 21, 2001. Appointed by President Bush, Paige was the first African American to hold the post.

[WHITE HOUSE BIO](#)

ALSO SEE: Colin Powell