

University Lecture Series
General Colin Powell
College-level Discussion Questions

1. In the preface to his book *My American Journey*, General Powell states “I have had a great life.....Mine is the story of a black kid of no early promise from an immigrant family of limited means who was raised in the South Bronx and somehow rose to become the National Security advisor [and] Chairman of the Joint Chief of staff...”

What specific aspects of Colin Powell’s journey allowed him to become the person he is? How does he describe these twists and turns in his journey? How does Powell’s journey compare with your own? Are the opportunities for the emergence of future Colin Powells more enhanced today or limited?

2. General Powell describes his childhood neighborhood and the social networks as follows:

“When I stepped out the door on Kelly Street, I saw my whole world. You went left three blocks to my grade school, one more block to my junior high school; between the two was a silver of land where stood St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church....Across from us lived my Aunt Laurice and Uncle Vic....And at 867 were Amy and Norman Brash, friends so close they were considered relatives...” (*My American Journey*, p. 10)

Have American cities lost their sense of neighborhood connectedness? Describe why you think they have or have not based on your own personal experience or on research or reading that you have done. Discuss (a) the factors that may have contributed to such a loss, and (b) the solutions to remedy the situation

3. In his review essay published in the *Political Science Quarterly*, Fred Greenstein talks about the attributes that General Powell would bring the Whitehouse. “Like Eisenhower ...Powell would be likely to command sustained public support and to be an effective problem solver, often not publicizing his actions. That he is an African-American would gild the lily, providing an impetus to Americans to mend their racial divisions and sending a message throughout the world about the resiliency of American democracy. Whether he will ever bring these qualities to the presidency cannot be known. As he put it on 8 November 1995, ‘the future is in the future’” (p. 629).

Should General Powell embark on another journey that would include a run for the White House? Discuss the qualities and problems that he would carry with him on this journey. Is the United States ready for a minority (including female) president?

(refer to “Colin Powell’s American Journey and the Eisenhower Precedent: A Review Essay by Fred Greenstein. *Political Science Quarterly* vol. 110. No.4 (Winter, 1995-1996) pp. 625-629

4. Recalling his student experiences at City College of New York, General Powell points out that while his memory of most of his professors have faded, “the memory of Raymond the Bagel Man (who sold giant Pretzels) remains undimmed” (*My American Journey*, p. 25). What people do you remember from your past? Why do you remember them? What attributes make them memorable? Will students or people you encounter remember you 20 years from now? If so, in what way?

What are the attributes of professors (or people) who leave a lasting memory on their students (or other people)?

5. In *My American Journey*, General Powell describes the impact that the public education system had on his life as follows: “I also owe an unpayable debt to the New York City public education system. I

typified the students that CCNY was created to serve, the sons and daughters of the inner city, the poor, the immigrant. Many of my college classmates had the brainpower to attend Harvard, Yale or Princeton. What they lacked was money and influential connections... I have made it clear that I was no great shakes as a scholar. Yet, even this C-average student (undergraduate level) emerged from CCNY prepared to write, think, and communicate effectively and equipped to compete against students from colleges that I could never have dreamed of attending."

What experiences have you had that have prepared you to "write, think, and communicate effectively"? What experiences have not prepared you for these skills? Do you feel that these skills are important? Why or why not?

Since we tend to use grades to measure the level of attainment of our students, what should be done to harness the hidden potential of even the C or D student, especially when such potential can not be readily measured quantitatively or even objectively?

6. In his book *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell*, Oren Harari provides insights into the leadership style of General Colin Powell. What factors contribute to effective leadership, and how are these factors exemplified in General Powell's leadership style? Can you give examples from your experience?

7. Describing the chasm that sometimes exists between African Americans and foreign-born blacks or blacks of non-American parentage, General Powell points out that "American blacks sometimes regard Americans of West Indian origins uppity and arrogant" (*My American Journey*, p. 22). Discuss the factors underlying this perception/chasm.

8. Nov 29, 2006 — DUBAI (Reuters) - Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said that Iraq had descended into civil war and urged world leaders to accept that "reality." "I would call it a civil war," Powell told a business forum in the United Arab Emirates. "I have been using it (civil war) because I like to face the reality," added Powell. He said world leaders should acknowledge Iraq was in civil war.

President George W. Bush denied on Tuesday that sectarian violence had reached the scale of civil war. He said the latest wave of violence was part of a nine-month-old pattern of attacks by al Qaeda militants aimed at fomenting sectarian tension.

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Complete research on what is happening in Iraq, including analyses that offer competing perspectives, such as those offered by President Bush and Former Secretary of State Powell. How do President Bush and Former Secretary of State Powell support their positions? Who is expressing the more compelling argument?

9. In his speech celebrating 100 years of Boys and Girls Clubs, Colin Powell stated:

"It is not enough to celebrate the past," said the former U.S. Secretary of State and four-star general. "You have to always look forward."

He emphasized that children must be prepared to compete not on a battlefield, but within a global economy, saying, "We need to make sure *all* of our youngsters are prepared for this shift in competition." Powell stressed that young people must have a caring adult in their lives, a safe place to learn and grow, access to adequate healthcare, competitive skills, a solid education and the opportunity to give back to their communities.

"We have a solemn obligation," he said. "If children are raised properly, have a government that invests in

them, and have adults – like Club staff – who care, they can succeed. They should never be limited because we didn't help them learn and grow. Every child is our child."

Source: http://www.bgca.org/connections/06_summer/story1.html

How do we as individuals and as a society meet the goals detailed by General Powell? Do we provide:

- A safe place to learn and grow?
- Access to adequate healthcare?
- Access to a solid education?
- The ability to develop competitive skills?
- The opportunity to give back to their communities?

If so, describe how we do this and provide examples. If not, describe how and why not.

Other Relevant Materials/links

Colin Powell's Journey from 'Soldier' to Statesman (NPR)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6470616>

Interview With Regis Le Sommier of Paris Match (note: the French version of "My American Journey." is titled "L'enfant du Bronx.")

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/40008.htm>

Quotations from Chairman Powell: A Leadership Primer (by Oren Harari)

<http://www.govleaders.org/powell.htm>

Books

The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell by Oren Harari (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell by Karen DeYoung (Knopf, 2006)