

From the Desk of the Chancellor

Colin Powell speaks

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by Charles R. Bantz

My congratulations to the organizers of this season's Steward Speakers Series of which IUPUI was the proud title sponsor. The final speech of the season aligned perfectly with our mission and responsibility. Sharing a lifetime of achievement in the military, as a statesman, and now in the business world, Gen. Colin Powell (Ret.) began and ended his captivating speech Thursday night with his dominant theme – education!

In what felt more like a conversation among friends, Powell was candid, commanding, and humorous. He acknowledged his modest academic performance citing success in his ROTC courses as inspiration for the choice of the military for his career. He acknowledged racial discrimination and snobbery (for being a graduate of City College of New York, not West Point), yet was determined to always do his very best and keep learning. He made crystal-clear service in the military provided an opportunity to contribute and succeed based on his performance.

His family had high expectations. Failure was not an option as he shared his Jamaican immigrant parent's admonition that he not "shame the family." He credits them for being his first mentors and greatest motivators growing up in the South Bronx. From that beginning in NYC, he stepped up at each level of his career--so much so that what family, what college student could imagine his serving four U.S. Presidents, being the first at so many things – including first non-West Point chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and first African-American Secretary of State.

The General served the U.S. in the Army for 35 years. He served as Secretary of State for four years. He served as National Security Advisor. So it is no surprise that he continues to serve and educate to service.

Powell beams with pride over the 1997 establishment of the Colin L. Powell Center for Leadership and Service established at the City College of New York. In 2013, he became honorary chairman of the Colin L. Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership at his alma mater. Just as we emphasize community engagement and outreach at IUPUI, Powell addressed the need for meaningful partnership. Despite poverty, discrimination, and 72 percent of black children born to unwed mothers, Powell said, no excuses justify the risk of losing a generation. "It is our collective responsibility to help our children get what they need to succeed."

Powell and his wife of 52 years, Alma Johnson Powell, founded America's Promise Alliance, dedicated to forging a strong and effective partnership to help children receive fundamental resources needed to succeed. The five promises are (1) caring adults, (2) safe places, (3) a healthy start, (4) effective education, and (5) opportunity to help others. The partnership is comprised of almost 400 national organizations including leading nonprofit groups, businesses, communities, educators and policy makers.

With all the awards and accolades Powell has received nationally and around the world, he said it is easy to identify his most gratifying acknowledgement. His greatest source of pride in personal and professional achievement is the fact that nine elementary schools in the U.S. bear his name.

Powell said the children are our best hope for the future. "Many point to the 2016 election but there will be no Superman or Superwoman emerging from that process to solve all of our problems. More than anything we need Super People." Children must know that the key to their future is education; that if they work hard and show themselves conscientious learners, they won't have to search for mentors because mentors will eagerly look to help them.

Powell assured the audience at the Marriott Hotel that with all of its challenges, the United States remains the greatest country on earth; that the world still looks to America for leadership. He noted that studies show that in the near future, the majority of Americans will be citizens of color "and they must be ready to lead." I agree with Powell in the inference that diversity is not an option, but a reality. And clearly, the key for all children when it comes to achieving and sustaining a higher quality of life is and always will be education.

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