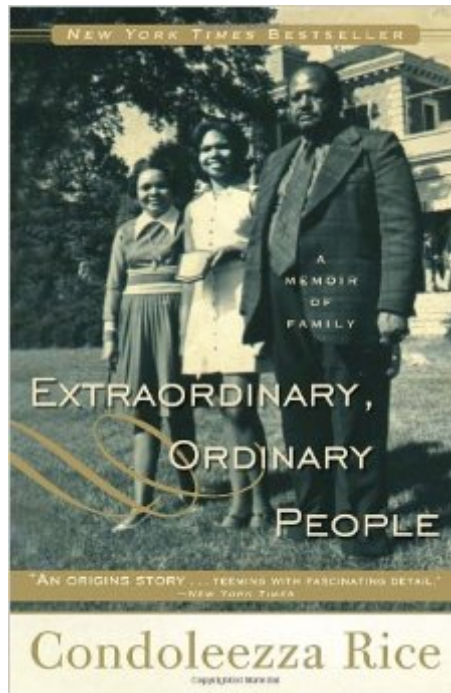


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Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir Of Family



Synopsis

Condoleezza Rice has excelled as a diplomat, political scientist, and concert pianist. Her achievements run the gamut from helping to oversee the collapse of communism in Europe and the decline of the Soviet Union, to working to protect the country in the aftermath of 9-11, to becoming only the second woman - and the first black woman ever -- to serve as Secretary of State. But until she was 25 she never learned to swim. Not because she wouldn't have loved to, but because when she was a little girl in Birmingham, Alabama, Commissioner of Public Safety Bull Connor decided he'd rather shut down the city's pools than give black citizens access. Throughout the 1950's, Birmingham's black middle class largely succeeded in insulating their children from the most corrosive effects of racism, providing multiple support systems to ensure the next generation would live better than the last. But by 1963, when Rice was applying herself to her fourth grader's lessons, the situation had grown intolerable. Birmingham was an environment where blacks were expected to keep their head down and do what they were told -- or face violent consequences. That spring two bombs exploded in Rice's neighborhood amid a series of chilling Klu Klux Klan attacks. Months later, four young girls lost their lives in a particularly vicious bombing. So how was Rice able to achieve what she ultimately did? Her father, John, a minister and educator, instilled a love of sports and politics. Her mother, a teacher, developed Condoleezza's passion for piano and exposed her to the fine arts. From both, Rice learned the value of faith in the face of hardship and the importance of giving back to the community. Her parents' fierce unwillingness to set limits propelled her to the venerable halls of Stanford University, where she quickly rose through the ranks to become the university's second-in-command. An expert in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs, she played a leading role in U.S. policy as the Iron Curtain fell and the Soviet Union disintegrated. Less than a decade later, at the apex of the hotly contested 2000 presidential election, she received the exciting news -- just shortly before her father's death -- that she would go on to the White House as the first female National Security Advisor. As comfortable describing lighthearted family moments as she is recalling the poignancy of her mother's cancer battle and the heady challenge of going toe-to-toe with Soviet leaders, Rice holds nothing back in this remarkably candid telling. This is the story of Condoleezza Rice that has never been told, not that of an ultra-accomplished world leader, but of a little girl -- and a young woman -- trying to find her place in a sometimes hostile world and of two exceptional parents, and an extended family and community, that made all the difference. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Three Rivers Press (October 11, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307888479

ISBN-13: 978-0307888471

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (167 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #421,260 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #229 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > South](#) #981 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > African-American & Black](#) #2320 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Political](#)

Customer Reviews

I have long admired Condoleezza Rice. I first saw her on the "Donahue" show, where she made several appearances as a leading expert on the Soviet Union. Since I myself am fascinated by the Soviet system and the old Eastern Bloc, I clung to every word she said. When she later became part of the George W. Bush administration, I knew exactly who she was. However I may not have been able to recall who she was if it wasn't for her distinctive first name, or if Phil Donahue had not made such a big deal about her having read *War and Peace* in the original Russian. Since I myself am a student of European literature, I don't think it's out of the ordinary to read texts in their original language, especially so for a PhD as Dr. Rice. Back when Rice made these and other early TV appearances, she was always introduced as having read Tolstoy's mammoth work in its original Russian. At that time, I thought that there was some understated prejudice at work, and from Phil Donahue no less. Would he have been less impressed if a white male had been his Soviet expert? Would he have even introduced a man this way? Perhaps I am looking for discrimination when there isn't any, as I am sure all of us have used *War and Peace* as a metaphor for an extremely long piece of literature. And if one happened to tackle that colossal novel in another language, one that doesn't even use the Roman alphabet, it does seem impressive. In *Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family*, Condoleezza Rice tells the story of her family, up until the death of her father, right before she joins the Bush administration as National Security Advisor. Rice has appeared on various talk shows promoting this book, and has said that she will tell about her eight years in the Bush administration in a separate work.

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