

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

A Civics In Real Life Series

FEMALE FIRSTS

CONDOLEEZZA RICE



When it comes to breaking barriers, without a doubt, one of the most important names to know is [Condoleezza Rice](#). Achieving not one, but multiple “female firsts”, Rice has played a pivotal role in American diplomacy and U.S. foreign policy. A brilliant and gifted child, Condoleezza Rice entered college at age 15. She first considered studying music to become a concert pianist, but was inspired to major in international relations. She would obtain a MA in economics from the University of Notre Dame and a Ph.D. in international studies from the University of Denver. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Rice attended the city’s segregated schools, until her family moved to Denver, Colorado. Later, she explained that “my whole community was determined not to let their children’s horizons be limited by growing up in a segregated Birmingham.”

Condoleezza Rice rose to prominence quickly in her career. In 1981, she began teaching at [Stanford University](#). In 1993, she was selected as its Provost, making her the first woman and first African American to hold that position. During her tenure at Stanford, she was often asked to advise President George H.W. Bush’s administration on matters related to the Soviet Union and the end of the [Cold War](#). In 1999, Rice stepped down from her position as provost to be a foreign policy advisor to then-Governor George W. Bush during his presidential campaign. Once he was elected president in 2000, he appointed Rice as the head of the [National Security Council](#) (NSC), making her the first female to hold this position. During her time as National Security Advisor, Rice helped lead the country past the [September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks](#), through the [Iraq War](#), and the efforts to root out terrorists and combat global terrorism. In 2005, she [succeeded](#) Colin Powell as secretary of state and became the first Black woman to hold the position. As secretary of state from 2005-2009, Rice implemented a policy she called “transformational diplomacy”, which “sought to redistribute U.S. diplomats to areas of severe social and political trouble and address issues such as disease, drug smuggling and human-trafficking, and reemphasize aid.” Rice successfully negotiated many agreements in the Middle East, including bringing an end to fighting between Israel and Hezbollah forces in [Lebanon](#) and a [solution](#) to the occupation of the Gaza Strip. She also convinced North Korea to engage in [talks](#) with the United States regarding ending their nuclear program. In 2009, with the inauguration of Barack Obama as president, Rice returned to Stanford University. She [continues to teach](#) and play the piano. She is an avid golfer as well, which earned her another “female first” when in 2012 she became one of the first two women to be offered membership into [Augusta National Golf Club](#). While she is no doubt proud of her accomplishments and achievements, she still hopes “the day [will] come when it is not a surprise that a woman has a powerful position.”

Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

Number of cabinet posts that have been filled by women:	
Cabinet position women have held the most:	
Cabinet position women have held the least:	
Number of cabinet or cabinet level posts that have been filled by women of color:	

To complete the table and learn more: [Rutgers University - Women Appointed to Presidential Cabinets](#)



Lou Frey
Institute