

# "Con-di-fi-cation": Black women, leadership and political power<sup>1</sup>

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Every colonized person who today accepts a governmental post must know clearly that he will sooner or later be called upon to sponsor a policy of repression, of massacres, of collective murders in one of the regions of... the [French] empire (Fanon, 1958: 118).

The exigencies of projecting US power, conditioned by the ever-present rhetoric of the threat of terrorism, but not determined by it, transcends party and racial affiliations and ensures that those black Americans – and for that matter other people of color and women – who rise to positions of strategic foreign policy construction will substantially represent state interests above all others (Lusane, 2006: 197).

## Introduction

What happens when members of a subordinated group rise to power within an oppressive system? Who do these people end up representing? How does a black American woman manage the internal/domestic histories while understanding her location in diaspora and transnational spaces? What happens when a member of a subordinated group now ends up being the face of empire? How do class, status and political affiliation affect the nature of one's participation in the political and intellectual process? How do we begin to subject the rise of black women to leadership positions to the kind of internal critique that is fair and necessary?

This article responds to these questions by examining the meaning of Condoleezza Rice, a black woman secretary of state of the US (2005 to the present), and therefore the international spokesperson for contemporary American imperialism.

The rise of black women to various positions in state power between 2005 and 2006 is one of the historical contexts in which Condoleezza Rice can also be placed. In many ways, it reflects decades of feminist activity that challenged the logic that leadership is always and only male. With Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf,

the new president of Liberia, Portia Simpson Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica, and Michaëlle Jean, recently appointed Governor General of Canada, we have the beginnings for an analysis of their contributions and failings once they access political power. Earlier, Valerie Amos in London became Baroness Amos, appointed by the Blair government to a ceremonial position and title in the House of Lords. What is different, perhaps, is that Condoleezza Rice has risen to power in the belly of US imperialism; and in order to be successful, she seems to have to work towards being the most efficient articulator of its machinations.

A brief comparison with other black women who have sought to make similar moves toward the centre of US state power is worth considering. The variety of congresswomen of integrity and recognition such as Barbara Jordan of Texas (who distinguished herself during the Watergate hearings) and Barbara Lee of California (the only congresswoman to vote against the war) provide a different model. Rice has indicated in most interviews that that she would never run for the office of president, preferring instead the kind of appointments she has had.

Perhaps more significant to this discussion is the former congresswoman from Brooklyn, Shirley Chisholm, who, in 1972, became the first African-American and the first woman to run for the US presidency. While she may be forgotten or unknown by a new generation, her example is worth recalling at least to provide some balance to the type of black woman like Rice who now serves as the media-driven black political role-models of choice. Congresswoman Chisholm, a member of the Brooklyn Caribbean diaspora community, campaigned with the slogan “unbought and unbossed”, offering a political position of integrity, claiming to navigate power on her terms, actually being the person who ran for that same office Condoleezza now helps to keep alive – and without having to go down on her knees to powerful white men.

Based on a presence and politics that is the opposite of Chisholm, “bought and bossed” is one way of seeing Rice, given the range of benefits she has accrued on various boards of multinational corporations as she rose to this position. With a politics aligned with representing the interests of US imperialism and multinational corporations, Rice has served the interests of big business, has been on the boards of directors of Chevron, TransAmerica Corporation, Hewlett Packard, J. P. Morgan and Charles Schwab. Antonia Felix reports:

Condi joined the Board of Directors of Chevron Corporation, a multinational with oil operations in 25 countries, immediately upon returning to Stanford in 1991. Her expertise on the states that made up the former Soviet Union

made her a valuable asset for Chevron's oil interests in Kazakhstan. She worked extensively on those deals, including their plan to help build the pipeline from the Tengiz oil field across southern Russia to a Russian port on the Black Sea. Like her Hoover Institution colleague, George Schultz, who served as a director of Chevron before she arrived at the company, Condi supplemented her Stanford income with fees from Chevron that included a \$35 000-per-year retainer and \$1 500 for each board and committee meeting attended. By her tenth year with the company, she held over 3 000 shares at Chevron, stock worth \$241 000. Also like Schultz, she had a supertanker named after her – the 136 000-deadweight-ton SS Condoleezza Rice. (2005: 256–257).<sup>2</sup>

Often the only woman in the company of the world's most powerful men, with an Exxon tanker named after her, The S. S. Condoleezza Rice, her status as handmaiden to multinational corporations has been already metaphorically identified. By these means then, her name is no longer private property, and can also be moved from its personal to its corporate identification, as have the names of Oprah Winfrey and Martha Stewart.

But even more salient is the unabated loyalty she gives to one of the already-acknowledged worst presidents in US history. While this is an analysis that has to be carefully nuanced, the fact is that all biographical coverage defines Condoleezza as perhaps the most loyal of supporters of the president. Because she is also now noted for her ability to offer a quick and professional articulation of the most inane Bush policy position, she is also now identified as the major ventriloquist for US imperialism.

### *Ventriloquising imperialism*

Charles Lusane offers a very detailed reading of the foreign policy operations of Rice and Powell in his *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race and the New American Century*. He sees them as willing actors:

That Powell and Rice committed themselves to an administration that let blind ideological rigidity override competence, fairness, tolerance, and restraint, says much. More than innocent bystanders or dupes, both are implicated in Bush's failed presidency as part of the insider team and council that created and implemented his vision and agenda. Neither, to this day, has disavowed the Bush domestic and international doctrine of hegemony and power politics and the expense of domestic progress and global cooperation and development (2006: 187).

It is this process of black ventriloquising of imperialism which deserves its own language by which we can chart this and future actions that follow this pattern. “Condification” defines the process of the conservative black and/or female subject in power and working publicly against the larger interests of the groups to which s/he belongs. It therefore refers to a particular agent of a form of neo-colonialism, one very specific to US internal colonial dynamics and history. By these means, “condification” defines what happens when a black person, woman or Latino enters these same power structures and never or rarely identifies with their originating group’s interests, even when this is the status quo for white masculinity (i.e., representing its interests). “Condification” demands that one forgets one’s group interests and instead works to ensure its continued dominance. “Condification” also offers a language to identify the process of intellectuals (in this instance, the black female intellectual) from oppressed groups, who enter the seats of power and then use their knowledge with calmness for the benefit of oppression – in this case, American imperialism. The term “condification” is beautifully already prepared by the subject’s name that now lends itself to this definition. Thus, “cond-i-fi-cation” carries within it the “con” of conservatism; the “con” of being conned, along with the resonance of commodification, in the sense of being bought and/or sold for a particular interest. It also suggests the Fanonian self-alienating psychology of “conditioning” and “confusion” that is the ultimate product of racism as it is colonialism,<sup>3</sup> that is, being conditioned to work in the interest of a repressive state and against one’s own larger interest.

Being “condified”, then, refers to the public positioning of oppressive black conservatism and the normalising of the same while supporting amazingly offensive policies and politics, and masquerading them when convenient under a black umbrella. Being “condified” means being treated to a public “sweetness” or politeness, which functions as a camouflage for more insidious policies. Being “condified” ultimately means being extremely colonised or subjected to “condification”.

At the start of her appointment, the tendency was to see the former national security advisor (2001–2005) and current US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, as someone to be admired for occupying such a central position – and therefore a role model for young black women, someone that they could emulate. There are in fact reports that among women in a variety of African countries, she is also seen as a type of ideal black woman, one who has made it to the top of US state power by whatever means and that achievement itself

was to be admired. This rise to power began in 2000 when, following a highly contested national election, President Bush was selected as president of the US. He created perhaps the most ethnically diverse cabinet in history when he appointed two African-Americans and one Latino to key positions. Following the foreign policy debacle of, from all accounts, the pre-planned execution of the invasion of and War on Iraq (erroneously using the 9–11 terrorist actions on the US as pretext), and with the Bush administration on the wane, these perceptions now seem rather different.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in the wake of the treatment of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the view is quite the opposite among black youth and adults: pride at her accomplishments,<sup>5</sup> dismay at the absence of any benefits to black Americans.

Sylvia Wynter's take on Condoleezza Rice is instructive. Seeing her up close at Stanford, she describes Rice as "a black Margaret Thatcher", not just for her manifestation of Thatcher's trademark rigidity, but also for showing the tendency of some lower-middle class individuals (such as Thatcher was) to seek to escape their origins by all means.<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall's definition of "Thatcherism" is appropriately invoked here, given that in much the same way, "condification" has become the public presentation in the body of a woman (in this case, a black woman) of a range of policies that dismantle long and hard-fought-for rights, while defending this process with an amazing level of aggression. Hall defines "Thatcherism" as follows:

Thatcherism's project can be understood as operating on the ground of longer, deeper, more profound movements of change which appear to be going its way but which, in reality, it has been only occasionally and fleetingly, in command over the past decade. We can see Thatcherism as, in fact, an attempt to hegemonize these deeper tendencies within its project of "regressive modernization", to appropriate them to a reactionary political agenda and to harness to them the interests and fortunes of specific and limited social interests (1996: 224).

If Thatcherism is for Hall an attempt only partially successful in the task of "harness[ing] and bend[ing] to its political project circumstances which were not of its making" (1996: 224), then "condification" and "being condied" also involves being subjected to a certain maintenance of dominance under a cover of "sweetness", as in "con-dol-cee-za" – the original meaning of the name as given by her mother from the musical notation "with sweetness". Thus, cordiality and super-professionalism conveniently camouflage an appropriation of political movements as they simultaneously reject their larger historical implications.

“Condification” marks the limit, in my view, but can also be seen as the ultimate manifestation of a domestic black and/or feminist bourgeois discourse of women or black people’s access to power – thus having equal opportunity to oppress. At the same time, it becomes an affront to black feminist positions as expressed in their earliest and therefore most radical formations.<sup>7</sup>

The intent here is not to make “condification” an ideology or an “ism” (a body of thought or ideology that percolates through the implementation of policies and the articulation of a particular set of ideological principles). Instead, I want to present “condification” as a tendency, a project perhaps, a behavioural process that marks the rise of a certain neo-colonial elite in the US imperial context, operating for the benefit of the dominant state and its rulers.

Aime Cesaire describes US imperialism as the only imperialism from which one cannot recover intact (1972/2000: 76). Thus, within the framework of US imperialist desires and practices, we are in the “American hour”, in which “violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, conformism, stupidity, vulgarity, disorder” operates. So how does the intellectual navigate the contemporary globalised economies dominated by multinational corporations with a new “international division of labour,” a global poor and urban “underclasses... left behind on every significant dimension of social opportunity”? (Hall, 1996: 225).

Several other attempts have been made over the years to identify the nature of the co-optation of intellectual work in/for black communities. W. E. B. DuBois himself reversed his own formulation, finding in the end that he had not accounted sufficiently for the selfishness of the “talented tenth”. Still his double consciousness model lingers here as well, as does Zora Neale Hurston’s formulation of the “pet negro system”. Here she describes a certain mutual benefit to dominating white society as to the co-opted black intellectual or creative figure (1979: 156). Numerous examples of this abound regarding Rice’s relationship with and service to the Bush family. Bob Woodward in *Bush at War* reports that after her parents died, George and Laura Bush became in effect Condi’s family: she spent her vacations with them and was almost part of the household (2002: 34). Still, the “like one of the family” option for black subjects has an entirely other interpretation and history as it relates to the hierarchy of domestic service in white households, and generally to black service to white dominance.

Woodward’s *Bush at War* (2002) and *State of Denial* (2006) reference several situations that are not very flattering of Rice, who as secretary of

state seems to be bereft of the independence carried by her office, and too embedded in the Bush family pathologies. In *Bush at War* he gives examples in which the President states that Rice's job is to "bear the brunt of some of the fire ... to take the edge off a little bit. And she's good at that" (2002: 158). He is further cited as providing a revision for his purposes of the secretary of state position:

I was growing a little impatient. I can be an impatient person. Plus I feel comfortable being – one of the things I can be totally unscripted or unrehearsed with Condi. That's the nature of her job, is to absorb my – is to help, you know, kind of say, well Mr. President I appreciate that point of view, and I think you probably ought to think this way a little bit (158) ... She is a very thorough person, constantly mother-henning me (256).

**Patricia Hill Collins had earlier suggested:**

African-American women intellectuals are nurtured in this larger black women's community [which has created] *the outsider-within stance* ... leading to a generalized black woman culture of resistance. Out of the dialectic of oppression and activism come the experiences of African-American women generally that stimulate the ideas of Black Women intellectuals (1991: 12).

However, any construction of a generalised and uniform black/women's community seems directly challenged in scenes such as captured by Woodward. As Rice entertains for the "Big House", plays the piano for the Bush family, spends weekends in Kennebunkport (where she coached the president-to-be), stays in the small house in the family compound in Crawford, Texas during her vacations, and functions as the professor-as-homeschooler to an untrained and unprepared new president, the narrative is further complicated. For Condoleezza is also confident that she wants to demonstrate at each occasion that she is better at European culture than most white people, including the Bushes – and clearly she is.

Condoleezza Rice functions fully inside this dominance and seems to live out the "equal opportunity to oppress" model that Lorde identified in her "Equal Opportunity Poem" (1986: 16–18). Thus her description of Bush to Oprah Winfrey as a smart and intelligent man, which flies in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. Perhaps this is all another grand performance in the masking tradition of Darlene Clark Hine's definition of dissimulation. One of the criticisms of Rice, both as national security advisor and secretary of state, is that she has functioned as the person who flatters the president most,

operates with a fierce loyalty that Bush demands, and as a result has not been able to take a balanced and objective view of very dangerous world situations. In what has now been described as one of the world's most colossal foreign policy mistakes, the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent war seem to have been undertaken without any analysis or study of foreign policy or deep knowledge of the history and culture of that area of the world. Instead the cold war logic of Soviet scholar Dr Rice has impacted policy. Woodward provides numerous examples where a more knowledgeable reading of Middle East politics would have avoided bungled policy. So, using the fall of Stalin as a model, Rice felt that Iraq would be chaotic for a while ... "But history predicted it would be temporary. In the end, she was confident, order would re-assert itself, as had happened in the old USSR" (Woodward, 2006:158-9).

The more insidious reading of this process of "condification" is Rice's performing of a myriad of other service functions for an imperialist agenda, including participating intellectually in the construction of the Vulcan ideology. The Vulcans was the name given by Rice to an extreme right wing, foreign policy group, which included policy advisors from the Bush Senior administration and bridged to George W. Bush's regime. Vulcans include George Bush Sr, Richard Armitage, Robert Zoellick, Paul Wolfowitz (now head of the World Bank), Robert Blackwill and Richard Perle. As the co-ordinator and namer of the Vulcans, we are observing the operations of "condification" at its highest manifestation. Rice indicates that she chose the name "The Vulcans" from her hometown mascot: "the Roman god who created thunderbolts and hammered metal into tools for the gods ... I grew up right there in Birmingham with Vulcan ... I remember as a little girl that it was red if there was an accident or green if everything was clear" (Rice cited in Felix, 2005: 30). In this case, the selected Birmingham, Alabama image has to do with mythical European power. Given the multi-layered civil rights iconography of Birmingham, Alabama, this selection is telling. Felix's *Condi: The Condoleezza Rice Story* (2005) and indeed all the biographies written as children's success stories (see, for example, Ditchfield, 2003; L. Wade, 2003; M. Wade, 2004; Cunningham, 2005 ; Naden and Blue, 2006) identify her as growing up in Birmingham, Alabama in the 1950s and 1960s in a family that deliberately stayed outside of civil rights activity while attempting the impossible task of protecting their daughter from the very public and visible racism that surrounded them.

But Rice is also identified as not only serving, but formulating some of the repressive Vulcan policies. Elane Sciolino in "Bush's Foreign Policy

Tutor: An Academic in the Public Eye” (2000) describes this advanced role Rice played in Bush’s nuclear policy. Rice used her credentials as a political scientist at Stanford University and as a specialist on Russia as major credibility collateral at the National Security Council during the first two years of the Bush administration. Isikoff and Corn’s *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin Scandal and the Selling of the Iraq War* (2006) indicates a central role for Rice (along with Cheney, Rumsfeld and Bush) in the selling and spinning of the war (using the most forceful rhetoric in persuading the nation that war was necessary) and the maintenance of the current US position. Following the very condemnatory Baker/Hamilton commission report, an interview with Rice on the PBS NewsHour, 21 December 2006, reasserted much of the Iraq War justification narrative as she defended the Bush strategy.

The conservative intellectual with power is well-represented here. The point is that major discussions about intellectual activism such as Said’s assume some sort of progressive ideological commitment. What happens when the ideological position is not in the interest of any progressive agenda, but is in fact its opposite, and that same energetic type of intellectual activism is used for the benefit of a dominating state? This is a paradigm in which Rice becomes a major player and exercises leadership. As we have already asserted, to be “condified” is to be subject to that sweet-and-sour home-grown approach to destruction by a member of one’s formerly identifiable racial, ethnic, class or gendered community. Therefore the actual practice of black and/or women scholars who occupy leadership roles has to be similarly interrogated, now that they have the potential of creating or affecting policy.

Related examples have already been provided by neo-colonial elites in Africa and the Caribbean. Condoleezza Rice, a black woman as the face of US foreign policy to the rest of the world, confirms that one cannot assume that one’s contribution is automatically radical because it comes from a member of a subordinated group. As a black woman conservative with US power, she articulates an identity that has not been seen to be publicly operating in this way before. Other conservative spokespeople from subordinated communities in myriad locations around the world resonate in minor ways but with similar effect, even with more localised impact. In Rice’s case, the international implications demand the kind of scrutiny offered here.

### *Exceptionalism as strategy*

The mythic media construction of Condoleezza as “the [exceptionally] smart black woman” also becomes a typical singling out of one member of a subordinated group as many others with similar talents are erased. In other words, there is a public sense that she is the only black woman who can answer questions in a professional style and presentation well recognised by those in the academy. Condoleezza, with normal academic credentials, herself admits in one interview that coming from Stanford, she is used to intellectuals producing many more books than she had in the same time frame. In her first eight years at Stanford, she is identified as publishing 15 articles and subsequently her dissertation, *Uncertain Allegiance: The Soviet Army and the Czechoslovak Army* (Princeton University Press, 1984). This was followed by an edited collection, *The Gorbachev Era*, co-edited with Alexander Dallin (Stanford Alumni Press, 1986) and a jointly authored *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Stagecraft* (Harvard University Press, 1995) with Philip Zelikow – average output for an academic at her level. What was significant, however, was her area of expertise, which few African-Americans specialised in, and her grooming for international relations work at Denver and Stanford.

Condoleezza therefore describes herself as a Europeanist, in the sense that her research expertise focuses on Europe, discussing it within its own terms. Ironically, in today’s world, lacking the kind of information or black world knowledge which African Studies develops represents a huge gap, indeed a lack of knowledge of most of the world. Being a Europeanist and being an Africanist are neither symmetrical in relation to the functioning of the academy, nor assigned the same value, academic space or size. Being a Europeanist in fact means specialising in the mainstream of the already European Studies-oriented academy in which African Studies is marginalised. According to Felix, when Rice was appointed national security adviser:

She also had to discuss her own limitations and admitted that the candidate was not the only one with much to learn. Condi’s career as a Soviet scholar gave her insight into that part of the world but little background in the political histories of other regions. She did not have a strong grasp of America’s policies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or other non-European nations, and had to undergo her own crash course in those areas (34). “I’ve been pressed to understand parts of the world that have not been part of my scope,” she said. “I’m really a Europeanist.” (2005: 34–35).

This means that she was uninformed (as she indicates in her own self-description) about the rest of the world, having earlier seen African Studies and other related “ethnic studies programmes” as not critical to her intellectual roundedness in terms of knowledge, the kind of information that attempts to account for lives outside the European world. Being a Europeanist thus also means a silencing and denial of colonialism, imperialism, and racial and sexual conquest.<sup>8</sup>

So in a world in which, as Wynter says, “everything Black has been negatively marked, and everything white has been positively marked” (2006), how does the black subject position her/himself? The best reading is offered by Fanon-defined black “self-alienation”, which is significant as it suggests that “the black alienated subject carries a consciousness that does not function in his best interest ... indeed it has to negate everything black in order to be that ideal representation of the human” (2006).

It makes sense therefore that it was under Rice’s leadership that Black Studies at Stanford would be dismantled from a model that had developed, via St Clair Drake, with a diaspora orientation. In the eyes of black Stanford alumni who had struggled as students to make Black Studies a permanent feature of their university’s experience, Provost Rice did nothing to advance this cause. Rice herself has conceded that some of the decisions she made at Stanford were perhaps too hard.

The issue of bourgeois American feminism in its general sense is perhaps the easiest lens with which to approach this issue.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the State Department, the rise of individuals such as Madeleine Albright was seen as evidence of women challenging the fraternity of men in leadership of the State Department. According to Antonia Felix, Madeleine Albright had throughout her career “been committed to the advancement of women in the field, and she considered her cabinet appointment a victory for all women” (2005: 309–310). If Madeleine Albright was seen as challenging the location of women in subordinate roles, one of the principles of US bourgeois feminism, then Condoleezza turned out to be the most fitting representative of black and female success according to the model of the dominant society – highly accommodationist, conservative, clever – but not for the benefit of the wider black communities.<sup>10</sup>

The model of choice for Condoleezza, however, is not Albright, her female predecessor, but the late Jean Kirkpatrick, hard-line US representative to the United Nations, who at her passing was identified by the Secretary of State’s office as follows: “This is somebody that the Secretary knew quite well. She

looked up to her as a role model, somebody who as a more senior policymaker and a senior academic always had time for more junior people, people like Condoleezza Rice, who was then coming up through the ranks of academia.”<sup>11</sup> But Kirkpatrick was also known for her extreme conservatism and also that same Thatcher-like rigidity.

There is no indication that I have seen so far that Rice sees herself as articulating any black and/or feminist positions, even as she benefits from their political work. Perhaps the closest one gets is in her speech to the American Baptist convention.<sup>12</sup> Here Condoleezza announces, to applause from a group of largely white men, that once she finishes her term it will be 12 years since a white man has held the position of secretary of state. The rhetorical question we can ask in response is: Has this made our world any better? From all accounts, the world seems a much worse place to those whose lives continue to be destroyed. Moreover, intellectuals in power operating for the benefit of an oppressive state, such as this one, bear some responsibility for participating in this process, even leading it at times.

The link between Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* [The Wretched of the Earth], and the logic of condemnation or election is fascinating in this context. Living out, if not publicly advancing, a bourgeois feminist position occupies the same pole as an effaced blackness. In other words, how do we account for the “damned” and the “wretched” who remain the sizable population of black communities wherever they are, even as selected black beneficiaries reap the rewards of struggle? The New Orleans Hurricane Katrina debacle makes this point clear, for the wretched were visibly abandoned without any support.<sup>13</sup>

### **The levees and the limits**

In “Towards African Diaspora Citizenship,”<sup>14</sup> I identified as constitutive the long history of forced migration, which displaced African peoples, moving them globally from a range of political formations in pre-colonial nations, empires and other smaller ethnic political structures. This logic of diaspora is what, in some contexts, drives some understanding of related formations and varied geographical conditions. One of the key features of this understanding is that the majority of these groups, exploited for centuries, remained consistently debased and disenfranchised in their new locations. African-Americans are prominently located as one of these groups. In the US in particular, conditions existed of labour abuse, the denial of rights, beatings, maimings and other forms of physical brutality which accompanied the processes of jim-crowding,

sharecropping and extreme racial segregation – all of which can be seen as the equivalent to an internal colonialism that succeeded plantation slavery.

The intent of Pan-Africanism was to make itself a practical and achievable political reality – one that went beyond the rhetorical articulations. And one can now see the results of the great deal of work that has gone into identifying the contours of the African diaspora. A dynamic library of and discourse on African diaspora studies (see, for instance, Harris, 1993; Okpewho, 1996; Boyce Davies, 2002; Edwards, 2003; Gomez, 2003) is helping to shape the contemporary understanding of the diaspora. It is here that the relevance of St Clair Drake, who developed Stanford's Black Studies Program, becomes relevant to this discussion. Drake's "Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism" offers a thoughtful overview of the ways that diaspora and Pan-Africanism as concepts interact, function concurrently and provide research agendas for the future. This was a project which at Stanford, perhaps with some imagination, could have provided an imaginative research agenda and even an African diaspora "think tank" along the lines of other versions at Stanford if it had been well-supported at the institutional level.

The maintenance of some clear connections – cultural, economic, demographic and political – for the advancement of African-descended people has nevertheless remained a constant feature even as the critique of essentialised identities and imagined communities remain. Historically, black public intellectuals, including the conservative Booker T. Washington, have accommodated at least some minor version of this, even if strategies have differed.

And here the issue of the victims of Hurricane Katrina and the breaking of the levees re-enters, as it revealed most starkly the frailty of citizenship rights for US African-Americans. Black people worldwide, by extension, descended again into Hurston's "infinity of conscious pain" as participants and as witnesses of another epic, slave-ship-like cycle of degradation. The absence of black political figures with the power that Rice has from this situation also has foreign policy implications, as it relates to the African diaspora policy aspect of international relations.

Recent activity on the diaspora at the political level offers perhaps the most important practical application of years of scholarship on African diaspora and the political activism of Pan-Africanism as identified by St Clair Drake. The African Union, after appropriate deliberations, has decided to account for the dispersed African populations in the traditional legacy of Pan-Africanism.

It has voted that the diaspora would be its sixth region, and various plans are in place to activate some practical features of diaspora exchange. The earlier identified inabilities of figures like Rice to be equipped intellectually to deal with these new developments resonates strongly as the US remains unaccounted for in these developments. Brazil recently hosted the Congress of African Diaspora Intellectuals (CIAD II in July, 2006) and Trinidad has already hosted a Caribbean meeting on the African diaspora sponsored by the African Union. Once again, African-American interests were not represented at the official level (although many African-American individual public intellectuals and NGOs were present), as they were also at the 2001 Conference Against Racism in Durban.

In many ways, the US imperial project as developed in the Caribbean has been the building of its version of imperialism as European imperialism has waned. The more recent attempts in the Middle East, via Iraq, have been to create a series of what Greg Thomas calls “future super-colonies”. The current disastrous result (which echoes the Césaire formulation) is that at the end of 2006, with close to a million Iraqi people killed, worsening humanitarian conditions and a country totally destroyed, the Iraqis and their neighbours have refused to consign their country to the US imperial project.

Yet in visits to Brazil and in the Caribbean, as in the US, Rice is not above using race and Jim Crow history to legitimate herself and thereby the policies of US imperialism. Beyond that, and after those encounters, we see no visible recognition of the Afro-Brazilian experience, the Caribbean experience or the African experience in US foreign policy under her leadership of the State Department – unless framed within US interests. My search for policy material that specifies US State Department policies on Africa and on the Caribbean, for example, continues to be unrewarding, except for sporadic stabs at genocide in Darfur. Repeated speeches instead describe the importance of building what Rice calls “transformational democracy”. And under the Project for the New American Century (“Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century”), the current administration’s position supports an aggressive military as is being used in Iraq (as it was in Grenada, Panama and Haiti). “Transformational democracy”, then, can also be effected by pre-emptive military action if appropriate, shorthand for US style-democracy and ultimately US imperialism.

So on the issue of the diaspora, so far, African-Americans remain officially outside of these frameworks. Some countries would say this is a good thing,

being understandably wary of US “transformational democracy” projects such as the Iraqi debacle. Still, this remains a weak spot for this Secretary of State: the inattention to the political movement to operationalise the African diaspora on the one hand; the US failed imperial projects in the “Middle East” on the other. Even a smaller project such as the inaugural Caribbean Heritage Month celebration, which took place in June 2006, seemed to happen without her public involvement. The particulars of US attempts at global hegemony may mean that US interests get acted on in this new form if the structure is malleable. In the meantime, the African-descended populations in South America have come up with their own human rights statements meant to identify their relationships to the rest of the African diaspora, their rights as linked to indigenous peoples, and the desire to be educated about the history and contours of their African and African-diaspora experience.

American imperialism, even as it wanes, has left US African-Americans in the unfortunate position of being within the belly of this beast notwithstanding, fighting its wars and representing its failed foreign policies.<sup>15</sup> Within the “diaspora” framework, the question of US hegemony itself has to be consistently re-addressed. In a way, African-American representation has a choice: either to walk out of Durban<sup>16</sup> officially (as Colin Powell did) rather than deal head-on with racism and imperialism; or participate in another diasporic geography that has nothing to do with having the benefit of US power.

Thus, the internal colonialism model as applied to the US, raised by thinking African-Americans in the US, is worth recalling, given the rise of people like Rice who are clearly functioning in a way recognisable to those who have seen neo-colonial elites operating in other parts of the world. The epigrammatically captive experience of the black people of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and the breaking of the levees, without access to any leadership that could represent them, is the other side of this neo-colonial construct; and there are several others that fit the contours of internal US neo-colonialism.

Michael Dawson in *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* sees the ten-point programme of the Black Panther Party as one of the articulations of this internal colonialism. Black people in the US have consistently argued for themselves as a separate nation confined within the borders of the United States, and therefore constituting an oppressed nation with the right to self-determination. The generations of early Pan-Africanists coming from the US, such as Anna Julia Cooper, and DuBois, seemed to articulate a similar point. And even before this, Martin Delaney and

David Walker made similar connections. Walker's *Appeal* addressed the "colored people of the world" prior to the formation of a diaspora language. Malcolm X later characterised the plight of African-Americans as that of an internal colony – oppressed and colonised people of the US who needed to forge links with international communities. For Malcolm X, as for a variety of leaders, the links with other colonised peoples would be openly made during the civil rights era, with references to "brothers and sisters in Asia who were colonized by the Europeans, our brothers and sisters in Africa, who were colonized by the Europeans, and in Latin America, the peasants who were colonized by the Europeans" (Cobbs Hoffman and Gjerde, 2002: 350-351).

Several complaints lodged before the UN by DuBois, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party and Claudia Jones have sought to have the dwindling human rights of African-Americans redressed. As recently as the 2000 presidential elections in Florida, African-Americans went to the UN to get their rights protected. And the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina and the broken levees reveal that even if a foreign government offered help, unless the US accepted it, then disenfranchised black communities in the South, dying from the effects of a devastating storm, could not be reached, bordered as they are in the US.

Within the internal colonialism model, then, one can see the rise of a neo-colonial elite in much the same way as this has occurred in other geographical locations. A range of black political figures and moneyed folk, entertainers and the like, act from that position. In the case of the neo-colonial elite, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, Clarence Thomas and a range of other political actors function publicly in the interest of the dominant state, and at the expense of the advancement of their communities, undoing previous and hard-won gains while repudiating these same communities' struggles. Thus, following Hurricane Katrina and the breaching of the levees, perhaps the worst disaster to befall a black people since enslavement, with all the signifiers and their referents attached, the black woman who has indicated that she can tell George Bush anything (according to an interview published in *O Magazine* in 2002); who has his ear and an amazing chemistry with him, behaved in a way that caused many to wonder how come the black woman who has the ear of the President did not make her people's life any better at a critical and historically definitive moment.

Given to using football metaphors and seeing herself as the administration's quarterback, when asked about the vision of African-Americans stranded on

rooftops in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Rice, after denying that the range of failed responses by the Bush administration was because of the race of the majority of the victims, reserved her strongest anger for the people who dared to criticise the president's lacklustre response to the disaster: "But I will tell you what I deeply resented. I resented the notion that the president of the United States, *this* president of the United States, would somehow decide to let people suffer because they were black. I found that to be the most corrosive and outrageous claim that anybody could have made, and it was wholly and totally irresponsible." When pushed a bit more by the interviewer, she indicated that it was the storm of the century, "it was certainly not because anybody wanted to be negligent or cared less because these were Black Americans. That was a ridiculous lie" (White, 2006: 187). In other words, in the range of things to be angry at in this situation, Rice is angrier at the attack on the president than on what happened to black Americans. And the misperception, in her eyes, that the Republicans have "blown off" African-Americans and Africa (actually a response to singer Kanye West's claim "George Bush does not like black people") is also a lie in her view on the grounds that Bush has given huge increases in funding to historically black colleges and has tripled his development assistance to Africa. (However, according to those on the ground, a great deal of that monetary assistance has never been paid.)

Within the logic of PNAC (Project for a New American Century – actually an American imperialist project) and the official "transformational democracy" position of the Bush government, with Condoleezza, a African-American as the primary face of US foreign policy to the world, and given that "global hegemony" is one of the US missions, Condoleezza and the process of "condification", represents for me the possibility of a global US hegemony articulated through the most deceptive and cynical of ways – the face of a black woman. From all reports, she thinks of US foreign policy largely in terms of US national and strategic interest, with the US maintaining international leadership.

Although at the height of her professional career, still with many more miles to go, many US African-Americans still live in the seemingly false hope that someone with access to the ear of the president (especially given that in the understanding of politics in Washington, DC, access means power) will at some point be able to *represent* them, thereby transforming that access power to something tangibly useful for the African diaspora.

### *Practices of power*

A new subject of study for black feminist intellectuals must then be the practices of black women in power and political leadership. Condoleezza Rice, as we have established, is one of these seemingly powerful women, acknowledged as being the closest person to the president on his Cabinet. The question is how someone who has acquired this level of power can best exercise leadership. Since Rice is also identified as intimate friend and confidante of the president, identified as having amazing chemistry with him, “home-schooling” him on international affairs, pronunciation of words, names of foreign leaders, and consistently creating much of the foreign policy that he articulates,<sup>17</sup> she must surely then be subjected to the same scrutiny as him. Bush himself has described her in the often-quoted phrase as able to “explain to me foreign policy matters in a way I can understand”.

Rice’s co-optation of the civil rights narrative and the women’s movement is used for the purposes of war and imperialism, even as she maintains that her race and gender are irrelevant to her options. It is not unusual to hear Rice comparing the war on Iraq with the American Civil War and the liberation of the enslaved Africans. In a recent article in *Essence Magazine*, with its known black readership, she was asked by the interviewer about the \$250 billion cost of the war, the deaths and wounding of tens of thousands of military and civilian people, and whether the war was a right thing since she had supported it from the start. Rice responded with perhaps one of the most incredible political cartwheels ever seen, claiming that slavery might have lasted longer in the US if the North had decided to end the war early: “I’m sure there are people who thought that it was a mistake to fight the Civil War to its end and to resist that the emancipation of slaves would hold. I know there were people who said why don’t we get out of this now, take a peace with the South, but leave the South with slaves?” (White 2006: 187). By these means, then, she appropriates the liberation of black people from enslavement to make the case for its opposite: the imperialist invasion and destruction of the once sovereign nation of Iraq, the resulting deaths of numerous US soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people, and the destruction of the physical infrastructure of Baghdad, once one of the world’s most beautiful cities.

In the final analysis, this is the conundrum of accessing power in a context of domination that Lusane, following Fanon, articulates in the quotations that open this piece. One either acquiesces, as the Fanonian example suggests, or acts swiftly and with principle for the benefit of one’s communities, knowing that

this access to power may be short-lived. Appropriating those power positions and utilising political movements, even as they are denied or erased by one's institutional interests, is a less than admirable position in which to be placed.

While we are now seeing the actual presentation through “condification” of a certain version of black female leadership, Audre Lorde’s “Equal Opportunity” poem had already imaginatively presented a black woman who has made it into the highest echelons of the US military complex, and who in this role has to assist in the execution of the worst of US policies – in this case, the invasion of Grenada. It closes tellingly with lines that present the diabolical result of this conjunction of US imperial power and black female identity:

The American deputy assistant secretary of defense  
 for equal opportunity and safety  
 pauses in her speech licks her dry lips  
 “as you can see the Department has  
 a very good record  
 of equal opportunity for our women”  
 swims toward safety  
 through a lake of her own blood.

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## Footnotes

- 1 This is a shortened version of a much longer paper presented at the Diaspora Hegemonies Conference, University of Toronto, October 2006. I thank the conference organisers for the opportunity to present preliminarily the first long version of this paper, which will be available in full on JendaJournal.com, the e-journal. The paucity of good material on this subject has prompted me to begin working towards a book on the subject. Thanks to readers Greg Thomas, Zillah Eisenstein, Monica Jardine, Babacar M'bow and anonymous reviewers of *Feminist Africa* for helpful comments at various stages of this paper's writing
- 2 The S.S. Condoleezza Rice would be renamed in 2001, as it served as a visible reminder of the Bush's administration obvious ties to the oil industry, with the White House facing questions about the appropriateness of the tanker's name. A list of other related activities while Condoleezza Rice was on the board of Chevron were identified in a protest statement distributed at the 2002 Stanford graduation by a student group. The full document is available at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/rats/condi>.
- 3 This latter point about "conditioning" is owed to Ngugi wa Thiong'o in response to my telling him what I was working on, during his book tour visit to Miami, 13 October 2006.
- 4 In a 2002 survey, then National Security Advisor Rice was viewed favourably by 41% of African-American respondents. As her role increased, some African-American commentators began to express doubts concerning Rice's stances and statements on various issues. Other writers have also noted a distance between Rice and the black community. Some have described her invoking the civil rights movement to clarify her position on the war on Iraq as cynical and offensive. Bill Fletcher, Jr, the former leader of the TransAfrica Forum, a foreign policy lobbying organisation in Washington, DC, has described her as "only black by accident." In August 2005, American musician, actor, and social activist Harry Belafonte referred to African-Americans in the Bush administration as "black tyrants". While Condi has been supported by Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women, there has not been much analysis by black feminist intellectuals. This is (as far as I know) one of the first attempts.
- 5 Conversations with students at a conference in honour of the 25th anniversary of the Women's Research and Resource Center at Spelman College in Atlanta, October 2006, indicated that while Rice might be the kind of woman that Spelman grooms in terms of poise and self-presentation, few could identify with her politically.
- 6 Available at <http://www.proudfleshjournal.com>.

- 7 See the positions of the National Black Feminist Organization and the Combahee River Collective, and even the earlier statements by Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Maria Stewart and Anna Julia Cooper. These articulated a radical critique of dominant US positions, rather than the “equal opportunity” model currently deployed in politics, the corporate world and some aspects of the academic world as well.
- 8 Zillah Eisenstein makes this point. Her own work on Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice (*Sexual Decoys: Gender, Race And War In Imperial Democracy*, forthcoming from Zed Press) makes some important allied arguments about the failure of these practices for the meaning of feminism.
- 9 Elaine Brown, for instance, identifies both Colin Powell and Condoleezza within the context of neo-slavery as “New Age House Negroes” and “New Age House Negresses”, and also suggests that within feminism, Condoleezza can be seen as a black feminist icon. See <http://www.proudfleshjournal.com/vol1.2/interview-eb.html> for more.
- 10 Conscious that one cannot assume any generic and uniform community, there is nevertheless a larger African-descended population that continues to be disenfranchised, and which many intellectuals and politicians have sought to represent. The question as to whether Condoleezza has any black “community” to which she owes anything came up as a question in the first presentation of this paper in Toronto, October, 2006.
- 11 Press briefing, 8 December 2006.
- 12 Available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/67896.htm>.
- 13 Clarence Lusane sees the Katrina disaster as having even more impact than the Iraq war in unmasking horrendous domestic policies that have consistently disregarded the poor (2006: 181–197).
- 14 Forthcoming in the collection *Black Geographies*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods.
- 15 An unpublished paper by Anton Allahar describes this “capitalist democracy” in his “unpublished paper “The Other Side of Democracy: the US and the War on Terror,” which he graciously shared with me in October 2006, following the presentation of a version of this paper at the University of Western Ontario.
- 16 Durban in South Africa hosted the International Conference Against Racism in 2001.
- 17 All of the biographies have identified this point. See, for example, Jacqueline Edmonson’s biography of Rice, which indicates that she made lists of foreign leaders for him and would rehearse them with him while doing things like exercising together (64).

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