

At thirty-two, Susan Rice became responsible for helping shape American policy toward dozens of African nations. Some of the diplomats she would lead had been working in foreign affairs longer than she had been an adult. She was also a new mother, learning the demands of caring for an infant while entering a position that required decisions about conflict, political transitions, humanitarian emergencies, and American interests overseas. The appointment carried the weight of history, but the work itself would be measured in preparation, judgment, and consequences. A prestigious title could place her at the table; it could not answer the questions waiting there. Over the following decades, Rice would represent the United States at the United Nations, advise a president on national security, and direct another president's domestic policy operation. Understanding that journey requires looking beyond the televised arguments that have sometimes overshadowed her name and entering the larger story of the family, education, ambition, and experience that prepared her for public service.

Susan Elizabeth Rice was born in Washington, D.C., on November 17, 1964. Her childhood belonged to a particular part of American history: the civil rights movement was transforming the country, and a growing number of African American professionals were entering institutions that previous generations had been systematically denied. Her parents, Emmett Rice and Lois Dickson Rice, were accomplished participants in that transformation. Susan grew up with educational opportunities, financial security, and access to influential adults. Those advantages deserve acknowledgment because her story does not begin in poverty. Yet the comfort surrounding her childhood had been built by people who knew exclusion firsthand. Her family's position represented years of study and persistence within a society that had repeatedly questioned their right to advance. She inherited opportunity alongside an awareness of what it had cost to create it.

Her father's career opened a window into an area of public life that often receives less attention than elections or speeches: the institutions governing money and economic opportunity. Emmett Rice was born in Florence, South Carolina, in 1919. He earned degrees at the City College of New York and later completed a doctorate in economics at the University of California, Berkeley. His work took him through teaching, international economic development, the Treasury Department, and the World Bank. From 1979 to 1986, he served on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. The Federal Reserve is the country's central banking system; its decisions influence the availability of credit and the broader conditions under which people borrow, save, and work. His responsibilities placed him within debates whose effects reached households that would never know his name. Susan therefore had an example, within her own family, of public influence exercised through expertise and sustained institutional responsibility. [The Federal Reserve's biography documents his career.](#)

Lois Dickson Rice devoted much of her professional life to another form of access: helping students afford higher education. The daughter of Jamaican immigrants who settled in Portland, Maine, she graduated from Radcliffe College and became an

influential education policy advocate. Her work helped establish and sustain the federal program that became known as the Pell Grant. A grant generally provides educational assistance that does not have to be repaid, unlike a student loan. The distinction can change whether a person attends college at all and how much debt follows that person afterward. Lois was one of the important architects and defenders of this approach, working within a larger effort involving educators, lawmakers, and other advocates. Her contribution offers a powerful example of achievement extending beyond one household: she helped strengthen a mechanism through which other families could pursue opportunities resembling those education had made possible for her own. Rice has described her mother's history and influence in her public discussions of family and service.

The connection between these two parental careers is revealing. An economist studies how resources are produced, distributed, and used; an education advocate works to change who can obtain knowledge and credentials. Both fields concern the organization of opportunity. Their daughter would eventually enter foreign policy, which involves the decisions a country makes in its relationships with other nations, and later domestic policy, which addresses conditions within its own borders. Across those different subjects runs a shared concern: institutions make choices that shape individual lives. A family may experience those choices as an affordable semester, a lost job, a safer neighborhood, or a relative sent to war. Government can seem remote because its language is formal and its organizations are large. The Rice family's professional history makes the connection more visible. Public policy becomes concrete when it determines what people can reach, what they can keep, and what dangers they must face.

There was also pain behind the accomplished family portrait. Rice has spoken about her parents' troubled marriage and the distress of their separation and custody dispute. As a child, she sometimes tried to intervene in their arguments. She later connected that experience with her tendency to move toward conflict and attempt to resolve it. Her godmother, the Washington educator and arts advocate Peggy Cooper Cafritz, became an important source of emotional support. These details complicate the assumption that privilege protects a child from fear or instability. A comfortable home can still contain relationships that leave children carrying responsibilities beyond their years. Rice's willingness to discuss that history gives her biography a human scale: the future diplomat was once a girl trying to understand and manage the behavior of adults she loved. Her later confidence developed alongside experiences of vulnerability. She recounts these experiences in her interview with Kojo Nnamdi.

At National Cathedral School in Washington, Rice combined demanding academic work with athletics and student leadership. Basketball became a lasting part of her identity. The sport rewards preparation, quick observation, and cooperation under pressure. A player must understand the immediate contest while anticipating what several other people may do next. That combination offers a useful introduction to the kind of work she would later perform, although athletic experience alone cannot explain a career in diplomacy. Her schooling also placed her in an environment where high expectations and

access to influential networks were already present. She had room to develop confidence, practice speaking, and imagine ambitious professional possibilities. For students whose surroundings offer fewer such examples, her educational path reveals why exposure matters. Before someone can prepare for an unfamiliar career, that person often needs to discover that the career exists and that the people doing it are human beings whose skills can be learned.

Rice entered Stanford University and graduated in 1986 with a degree in history. That choice is worth understanding because history prepares the mind for more than recalling dates. Serious historical study involves examining evidence, comparing accounts, recognizing the interests of different participants, and explaining how circumstances change over time. Those habits become practical tools in government. A border dispute may carry the consequences of an older war; a negotiation may be shaped by a promise that one country believes another country broke decades earlier. Rice has credited her history education with strengthening her research, writing, speaking, and analytical abilities. At Stanford, she also explored the experiences of African American workers in the Bay Area's wartime shipbuilding industry. That interest connected national events with the lives of people seeking employment and fair treatment, illustrating how large historical changes are lived through ordinary work, migration, and family decisions. Stanford preserves her reflections on this education.

A Rhodes Scholarship took her to Oxford, where she earned a master's degree in 1988 and a doctorate in 1990, both in international relations. The scholarship supports selected students in advanced study at Oxford; the achievement is significant, but the academic work that follows is equally important. Her doctoral research examined the Commonwealth's role in Zimbabwe's transition during 1979 and 1980 and its implications for international peacekeeping. The Commonwealth is an association of countries, many with historical connections to the British Empire. Peacekeeping generally involves an international presence intended to help maintain a ceasefire or support a political settlement, though missions differ considerably in their authority and capabilities. Her subject required studying the difficult movement from armed struggle toward an agreed political process. It placed questions about negotiation, security, sovereignty, and outside involvement near the center of her professional formation. Her educational record and dissertation are documented in her biography.

Advanced study can appear distant from action, especially when public life rewards quick confidence. Yet a doctorate requires a person to sustain attention on a complicated subject, account for competing explanations, and defend conclusions against informed criticism. The letters following a name do not guarantee wisdom. They indicate that a particular course of intellectual training has been completed. Rice's preparation mattered because diplomacy repeatedly demands distinctions that disappear in slogans: a ceasefire differs from a peace agreement; an agreement differs from its enforcement; a successful election differs from a durable democratic system. Learning those distinctions helps prevent hopeful language from becoming a substitute for realistic planning. Her academic path also broadens the picture of Black excellence. The fields

available to gifted young people include international scholarship, strategic analysis, and the study of institutions that determine how nations exercise power.

Her first full-time work after Oxford was in management consulting at McKinsey & Company in Toronto. A management consultant helps organizations examine problems involving operations, strategy, or performance and develops recommendations for addressing them. It was a different environment from a university, with its own emphasis on deadlines, concise presentations, and decisions supported by analysis. Rice subsequently entered the Clinton administration in 1993, joining the National Security Council staff with responsibilities involving international organizations and peacekeeping. She was twenty-eight. The National Security Council helps the president consider matters involving the country's security and foreign relations. Its staff collects information, develops options, and coordinates work across government departments. Entering that system placed her close to decisions whose effects could extend far beyond Washington, while also placing her within a hierarchy where other officials held greater authority. Rice describes this transition in Stanford's account of her career.

Inside such an organization, influence often depends on work that rarely becomes public. Staff members prepare briefing papers, identify disagreements between agencies, question assumptions, and help determine which issues reach senior officials. A briefing paper may be only a few pages, but producing it responsibly can require extensive research and consultation. Its purpose is to make a difficult decision understandable without concealing its risks. Intelligence, in this setting, means information and analysis used to assess threats, intentions, and capabilities. It can be incomplete or mistaken. Policy is the course of action leaders choose after considering that information alongside legal obligations, resources, and national objectives. Confusing the two creates problems: an assessment of what might happen does not, by itself, establish what a government should do. Rice began her public career in the demanding space between understanding a situation and recommending a response.

The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 became one of the gravest events associated with her early years in government. Extremist leaders and their supporters carried out mass killing directed primarily against the Tutsi population; Hutu who opposed the violence were also murdered. Genocide means an effort to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. The United States and the wider international community failed catastrophically to respond with the urgency and effectiveness the slaughter required. Rice was a member of the administration's national security staff during that failure. Declassified records place her among officials involved in discussions concerning Rwanda and international peacekeeping. She was not the president or the official with final authority, but she was part of the government whose decisions require examination. The victims' history cannot be reduced to a difficult episode in the career of any American official. The National Security Archive documents the administration's deliberations.

Rice later discussed Rwanda as an experience from which governments needed to learn, including the danger of waiting until mass killing is fully underway before organizing a response. Prevention requires attention to warning signs, clear responsibility, and the willingness to raise an issue before it becomes politically unavoidable. Her reflections at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum placed those concerns within the practical problem of improving government action. The larger lesson is demanding: concern does not automatically produce a functioning response. Officials need people assigned to monitor risks, mechanisms for bringing warnings to decision-makers, and realistic options that can be used in time. A government may contain individuals who are appalled by an atrocity and still fail collectively. Responsibility therefore includes examining the procedures, incentives, and choices that allowed inaction to continue. The museum records Rice's discussion of prevention and the lessons of Rwanda.

In 1997, President Bill Clinton appointed Rice assistant secretary of state for African affairs, a position she held until 2001. The title can sound less powerful than it is. An assistant secretary leads a major bureau within the State Department, the federal department principally responsible for diplomacy. Her responsibilities concerned American relationships with countries across sub-Saharan Africa. Those countries had distinct governments, languages, economies, political struggles, and priorities. Treating them as a single undifferentiated place would have made effective diplomacy impossible. Her work required dealing with leaders, directing staff, weighing American interests, and responding to developments across a large and varied region. The appointment also placed her in a particularly visible position as a young African American woman leading experienced diplomats. Her authority had been formally established, but the daily task of earning cooperation and exercising sound judgment remained.

Rice has acknowledged that she had more to learn about managing people than her academic preparation or rapid advancement might have suggested. She has described the challenge of leading colleagues who were substantially older, some of whom doubted that she belonged in the position. She also recognized mistakes in her own approach and the value of colleagues who offered candid feedback. That admission gives substance to her discussion of leadership. Knowing a subject and helping a group work effectively are related abilities, but they develop through different demands. A leader must explain expectations, listen without surrendering judgment, and make room for other people's expertise. Excessive defensiveness can turn every disagreement into a contest over personal worth. Confidence becomes more useful when it allows correction. Rice's account of her growth makes achievement something that continued to require learning after she received the title. She discusses these management lessons at the University of Michigan.

Her years overseeing African affairs included the 1998 terrorist bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The attacks killed Americans and many more local people, leaving survivors with devastating injuries and families with permanent losses. An embassy is a country's official diplomatic mission in another nation, but it is also a workplace involving local employees, visitors, and people living or

working nearby. Violence against one therefore reaches a community far larger than the officials whose photographs appear in news coverage. Rice's responsibilities brought her into contact with the human consequences of decisions about security and international engagement. In her memoir, she recalled a survivor of those bombings contacting her years later about his son's hope of attending the Naval Academy. The continuing relationship shows how the consequences of a crisis remain present long after its date has passed into historical summaries.

When the Clinton administration ended, Rice moved into research and policy work outside government, including a position at the Brookings Institution. A think tank is an organization where researchers study public problems and propose approaches for addressing them. Such institutions vary in quality, political outlook, and sources of support, so their work should be read with the same attention to evidence that any policy argument deserves. For a former official, research can provide time to examine issues beyond the immediate pressure of daily decisions. Rice's work during this period included foreign policy, global poverty, and threats that cross national borders. These subjects reflect an understanding of security that reaches beyond armies. Disease, institutional collapse, and severe instability can affect neighboring countries and create consequences far from their point of origin. Her public career would increasingly involve coordinating responses to problems that no single department or nation could manage alone.

Barack Obama's election brought her back into government. In 2009, Rice became the first Black woman to serve as United States ambassador to the United Nations, holding the position until 2013. An ambassador represents a government in its official relationships with other governments or international organizations. At the United Nations, Rice spoke for the United States, negotiated with other countries' representatives, and worked to advance the administration's objectives. Obama gave the position Cabinet rank, placing her among his senior advisers. The historical significance is substantial: a woman whose family had lived through segregation was now representing the country before the world. The position also carried obligations beyond personal representation. She had to defend American policies, including policies others strongly opposed, and seek agreements among governments with different interests. Her presence expanded the visible boundaries of authority while requiring her to practice its difficult daily work.

The United Nations itself needs some explanation to make that responsibility meaningful. It provides institutions through which countries debate problems and undertake collective action, but it does not operate as a world government with unlimited enforcement power. Its Security Council has particular responsibility for international peace and security. Five countries—the United States, China, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom—hold permanent seats and can veto substantive resolutions. A veto can block a proposal even when most members support it. This structure makes diplomacy essential and frequently frustrating. An ambassador may need to negotiate wording, persuade uncertain governments, and determine whether a permanent member will

oppose a measure. A public speech is only one part of that process. The quieter work involves discovering what an agreement can contain, what other countries will accept, and whether the resulting commitment can accomplish its intended purpose.

One example came in 2010, when the Security Council adopted Resolution 1929, imposing additional sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. Sanctions are restrictions intended to influence behavior by limiting access to resources, transactions, equipment, or other benefits. They can target particular individuals and organizations or affect broader areas of an economy. Their effectiveness depends partly on enforcement and the participation of other countries; restrictions imposed by one government may be easier to avoid when others continue supplying what has been prohibited. Rice represented the United States in this international effort. The episode illustrates an important dimension of diplomacy: pressure can be organized collectively through negotiated rules. It also invites scrutiny of whether that pressure achieves its purpose and what costs it imposes. Sanctions are tools with consequences, requiring evaluation rather than automatic celebration. The resolution's record details the measures and the Security Council vote.

Libya presented a more dangerous test in 2011. As Muammar Gaddafi's government fought an uprising, the United States and other governments argued that civilians faced an immediate threat. Rice supported international action, and the Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, authorizing measures to protect civilians and establishing a no-fly zone. A no-fly zone prohibits specified aircraft from operating within an area; enforcing it can require military action against aircraft and air defenses. The resolution was therefore a consequential authorization involving force. Rice's public explanation emphasized civilian protection. The subsequent intervention helped bring down Gaddafi, but Libya's future did not settle into the stable political order supporters had hoped for. The initial authorization and its aftermath belong together in any serious assessment of the policy. Rice's explanation of the vote is preserved in the State Department archive.

Libya descended into prolonged disorder involving rival armed groups, competing authorities, and further suffering. In 2016, Obama identified the failure to plan adequately for the aftermath of intervention as a major mistake of his presidency. Rice, as an advocate of the intervention and a senior administration official, belongs within the debate over that record. The episode exposes a central difficulty in foreign policy: the capacity to defeat an armed force does not ensure the capacity to establish a legitimate and functioning political system afterward. Removing a ruler leaves questions about who controls weapons, resolves disputes, provides services, and commands public trust. Those responsibilities cannot be supplied by optimism alone. Recognizing the seriousness of Libya does not erase Rice's accomplishments. It establishes the standard appropriate to the power she helped exercise, where intentions must be assessed alongside outcomes. Obama's acknowledgment was reported in 2016.

The name Benghazi then became inseparable from Rice's public image for many Americans. On September 11, 2012, attacks on American facilities in the Libyan city killed

Ambassador Christopher Stevens, Sean Smith, Glen Doherty, and Tyrone Woods. Five days later, Rice appeared on television news programs and described the attacks using the administration's initial assessment, which connected them to a spontaneous protest over an anti-Islam video. That explanation proved incorrect: there had been no such protest outside the diplomatic facility before the attack. The error mattered because officials were explaining an event in which people had been killed and because the public needed reliable information. Rice's appearances turned her into a central figure in a bitter political dispute, even though her position as United Nations ambassador did not make her responsible for managing security at the Benghazi mission. [FactCheck.org's timeline traces the changing public accounts.](#)

The investigations require a distinction between an inaccurate statement and evidence that its speaker knowingly fabricated it. Congressional examination documented serious problems in the intelligence assessment and the preparation of the talking points Rice used. The Senate Intelligence Committee found that mistaken reporting about protests had influenced the initial analysis. That finding did not make her public account accurate, and it did not excuse the security failures surrounding the attack. It did challenge the claim that the protest explanation, by itself, proved a deliberate invention by Rice. Several different issues had become entangled: protection of the facilities, the response during the attacks, intelligence analysis, and what officials subsequently told the public. Separating those issues is necessary to assign responsibility fairly. It also reveals how quickly a person's name can become shorthand for an entire controversy, making careful attention to the actual record especially important. [Reporting on the Senate findings explains the intelligence error.](#)

Amid the controversy, Rice withdrew from consideration for secretary of state in December 2012. The position would have placed her at the head of the State Department and required Senate confirmation. Losing that possibility was a significant professional setback, but her work in the administration continued. In July 2013, she became Obama's national security adviser, serving until his presidency ended in January 2017. The appointment placed her in a role built around direct access to the president and responsibility for coordinating his national security process. It also demonstrates why a career cannot always be understood as a single ladder with one correct destination. Different positions provide different forms of influence. An ambassador negotiates as an official representative; a secretary directs a department; a national security adviser helps organize the president's choices across departments. Rice's next responsibilities drew heavily on the ability to integrate other people's work.

As national security adviser, she oversaw the National Security Council staff, chaired meetings of senior officials, and helped coordinate foreign policy, intelligence, and military efforts. That position does not make its occupant the commander of American troops. The president exercises constitutional authority as commander in chief, and military commands operate through established chains of authority. Rice's influence came through advice, access, coordination, and the management of decisions. She needed to help ensure that the president understood available options and that the

relevant officials could carry out his choices. A proposal might involve diplomatic consequences identified by the State Department, military risks explained by the Pentagon, and financial measures developed by the Treasury Department. The adviser's task includes bringing these perspectives together without allowing one institution's concerns to obscure the whole problem. The Obama White House's description specifies her responsibilities.

The range of that work was considerable. Her tenure encompassed the response to the West African Ebola epidemic, efforts against the Islamic State, negotiations surrounding Iran's nuclear program, and the restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba. Each subject required different expertise. An epidemic demands public health knowledge, medical capacity, logistics, and international cooperation. A nuclear agreement involves technical monitoring, restrictions, verification, and political commitments. Restoring diplomatic relations establishes formal channels through which governments can communicate even while substantial disagreements continue. Rice did not personally perform every negotiation or design every operation. Her responsibility was situated within a larger team of officials, specialists, and partner governments. Appreciating the position means understanding that coordination is substantive work: decisions fail when agencies pursue incompatible goals, responsibilities remain unclear, or information does not reach the people who need it.

The 2015 Iran nuclear agreement illustrates that shared effort. Negotiators from the United States and other participating countries developed an arrangement placing limits and monitoring requirements on Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. Secretary of State John Kerry and numerous diplomatic and technical officials played central roles. Rice worked within the White House leadership supporting and coordinating the administration's approach. The agreement generated strong disagreement about whether its provisions adequately protected American and regional security, particularly over the duration of restrictions and Iran's other activities. Such debate belongs within the record of her service. A negotiated agreement rarely settles every conflict between the parties. Its value depends on the specific problem it addresses, the reliability of verification, and the consequences of available alternatives. Rice's career repeatedly placed her near decisions where responsible analysis required comparing imperfect possibilities.

Her family life continued through those years of public responsibility. She and her husband, Ian Cameron, met at Stanford and married in 1992. They raised two children, Jake and Maris, while her career moved through demanding positions. Cameron worked in television news, and the family's life cannot be reduced to a photograph accompanying an official biography. Public service at that level affects schedules, availability, privacy, and the distribution of responsibilities at home. Rice's memoir makes room for those personal dimensions, including the desire to recover time with loved ones after leaving office. That part of her story has particular value in a culture that sometimes celebrates a successful woman by making her sound inexhaustible. Human beings require relationships and periods of recovery. A life of substantial work is

supported by other people, negotiated commitments, and the recognition that professional importance does not remove personal needs.

In 2019, Rice published *Tough Love: My Story of the Things Worth Fighting For*. A memoir is an account of life written from the author's own perspective, drawing on memory and interpretation. It provides access to experiences and motivations that official documents cannot fully convey, while remaining one participant's account. Rice used hers to connect family history with public service and to discuss triumphs, setbacks, relationships, and difficult decisions. Its significance lies partly in her refusal to leave her public identity entirely in the hands of televised controversy. Writing allowed her to describe the wider life that existed around familiar headlines. Readers can encounter the scholar, daughter, parent, colleague, and official within the same person, while continuing to examine policy claims against other evidence. The publisher provides an overview and an excerpt from the memoir.

Joe Biden brought Rice back to the White House in 2021 as director of the Domestic Policy Council. The appointment surprised people who associated her primarily with foreign affairs. Domestic policy concerns matters within the country, including health care, education, immigration, public safety, and other conditions affecting everyday life. The council helps coordinate the administration's work across these areas. It does not replace Congress, whose responsibilities include passing laws and approving federal spending, or the agencies responsible for administering programs. Rice's role required translating broad presidential goals into coordinated work involving those institutions. She became the only person to have served as both national security adviser and domestic policy adviser. The distinction reflects an unusual range of responsibilities, but it also reveals a continuity: both positions depend on understanding complicated problems, organizing expertise, and moving decisions through a large government. Biden noted the historic combination when announcing her departure in 2023.

During her domestic policy tenure, the administration pursued expanded health coverage, prescription drug reforms, mental health initiatives, and measures addressing gun violence and policing. Biden credited her with important work across that agenda. These were collective efforts involving lawmakers, agencies, advocates, and many officials, and their effects varied by program. The practical meaning of such work deserves attention. A health policy may depend on eligibility rules, enrollment procedures, staffing, and whether people know assistance exists. A promising announcement can produce disappointing results if implementation—the process of putting a decision into practice—is weak. Rice's responsibilities involved that transition from stated intention toward government action. For the public, the ultimate test is what becomes available and usable: whether treatment can be obtained, whether a program reaches the people it was designed to serve, and whether institutions can explain their decisions clearly enough to be held accountable.

The administration's domestic record also remained contested and unfinished. Immigration policy involved intense disputes over border management, humanitarian

responsibilities, and the treatment of people seeking protection. Its broader ambitions faced congressional limits, court challenges, and disagreements over federal authority. Those conditions matter when assessing any senior adviser. Being responsible for coordination creates real obligations, but it does not provide unlimited control over legislation, judges, state governments, or events. Rice left the Domestic Policy Council in May 2023. Her departure ended another demanding period in government, leaving a record that included substantial policy work alongside unresolved problems. A mature appreciation of service allows both to remain visible. Public officials should receive credit for work they helped accomplish and scrutiny for failures within their responsibilities; neither admiration nor opposition should eliminate the need to establish what they actually did.

Rice has also worked beyond government through writing, public discussion, academic affiliations, and corporate board service, including at Netflix. A board of directors provides oversight of a company's leadership and broad direction; it is distinct from the employees who manage daily operations. Her movement among these settings reflects the range of institutions through which an experienced public figure can continue to exercise influence. It also reminds readers that public service is a portion of a life rather than a permanent claim to office. Titles change, administrations end, and new responsibilities arise. The knowledge accumulated through service can inform teaching and discussion, while remaining open to challenge. For younger people looking toward demanding careers, that is a useful model of continuing intellectual engagement after a particular assignment has ended. [Netflix's board biography records her public service background.](#)

Within Black America, Rice's life offers a substantial example of intellectual preparation becoming public authority. Her achievements enlarge the range of futures young readers can imagine: historian, international relations scholar, diplomat, presidential adviser, policy researcher. Those occupations deserve to become familiar possibilities. Their preparation involves reading carefully, writing precisely, understanding institutions, and learning to speak with confidence without pretending to know everything. Her story also makes the importance of support visible. Educational access, family expectations, professional relationships, and opportunities to practice responsibility all helped shape her path. Communities can nurture those conditions through teaching, mentoring, and the serious discussion of public affairs. Celebrating excellence becomes more useful when it helps others understand how expertise develops and where it can be applied.

There is room to admire Susan Rice without requiring her to carry an impossible standard of perfection. Her record contains historic appointments, considerable preparation, consequential service, and decisions that deserve continued examination. The ability to hold those realities together gives pride a stronger foundation. She entered fields where relatively few women resembling her had exercised comparable authority, developed expertise that presidents relied upon, and remained professionally engaged through controversy and disappointment. Her mother's work helped students reach college; her father's work placed him inside institutions shaping economic life; her own

career brought her into decisions about the country's place in the world and the conditions within it. Across those generations, education became something active—knowledge carried into offices, negotiations, programs, and responsibilities. For a reader beginning to imagine a larger future, there is an invitation in that history: study the work, learn how the institution functions, develop the ability it requires, and take seriously the people whose lives will be affected when the responsibility becomes yours.