

# Colin Powell Advises Howard Students to Lead With Integrity

Contributed by Jessica Lewis -- Black College Wire  
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"It is what I think about myself that counts."

Gen. Colin Powell urged student leaders to "focus on the followers" during an inspirational address at the ninth annual Howard University Student Leadership Institute.

He identified the students in the audience as the future leaders of this nation with the call that it is their turn now.

"You are the generation of my grandchildren," Powell said at the Nov. 14 event. "You are going to be leaders no matter what capacity in which you serve. You have to keep coming."

To help the students with their roles as the new leaders of America, Powell offered advice from his own leadership experience.

"My role as a leader is to focus on the followers. The followers get it done, not the leaders," Powell said. As he spoke, students followed his words with pen and paper in hand. "You want to do more than motivate; you want to inspire. Give them what they need to get the job done," Powell said.

Sophomore psychology major Ayesha Gowie felt she had the tools to succeed by the end of Powell's speech.

"Focusing on followers and making sure everyone knows their role is the most important thing," Gowie said. "He was very honest and forward about the knowledge he has gained from his experiences."

To aspiring leaders like Gowie, Powell asked students to call into question personal character. "Make sure you are a person who can be trusted," Powell said.

To build that trust among followers, Powell explained that leaders must be able to make decisions that will affect the lives of many without hesitation.

According to him, great leaders never turn away from a challenge, but instead face the reality set before them. To be able to face challenges, Powell said passion should be a guiding tool.

"Leaders have to be passionate about what you are trying to accomplish and that passion has to be infectious," he said.

He went on to say that one will know they're a good leader if people are willing to follow, if only because of curiosity.

Powell explained that curiosity has led him to the White House as the first African-American Secretary of State and the first African-American chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Powell added that he does not want the term black to define his journey. He said he wants people to look at him as the best, period, before recognizing him as the best black.

He admitted that during his time in office, he had to make unpopular decisions that made some question his leadership, but at the end of it all, he said that his opinion counts.

"It is easy to say the black community has written me off; the white community has written me off, but I do not care," Powell said. "It is what I think about myself that counts."

One of the tough decisions Powell recently had to make was his endorsement of President-elect Barack Obama despite his 25-year friendship with Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.).

Mathematics and Sciences Middle School (MS2) student, Macada Howell, believed Powell carried himself well and gave dignified answers that showed his intelligence.

Powell said there was a time in his life when others questioned his intelligence.

He said he was an average student with grades ranging from D to C, who found his calling in the armed services.

"It was unthinkable in my days for someone like me to have such aspirations and dreams," Powell recalled.

Now Powell has opened the doors for many more people like him.

Powell left the audience with these words, "Believe in yourself, believe in America, set high expectations, don't let us down."

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Jessica Lewis writes for The Hilltop, the Howard University student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.