



America's True Believer

B
Y

E
D
W
A
R
D

P
I
T
T
M
A
N

here's something in Colin Powell's eyes. Behind the intelligence and warmth is a seemingly unshakable certainty, and when you listen to him speak about America it isn't long before you're surprised by a lump in your throat. His views on America — that we are the source of freedom, a great light shining on a weary world — are what we would all like to believe about this country, what many of us once believed but perhaps lost sight of in the aftermath of the Watergates and Whitewaters of recent decades. But Powell never stopped believing in America, and that strength carried him through Korea and Vietnam, through the Cold War, to today — a time when freedom seems to be sweeping through the troubled countries of the world. The America Powell describes is like a dream we all long to return to. When we get there — when our cynicism about the political process fades, when we can put aside our personal agendas in order to do what is best for the nation as a whole — we should not be surprised to find Powell already there.

Ten years ago the **Bankers Club** in Cincinnati, Ohio, began the Distinguished Lecture Series to provide its members with powerful programs from the most influential personalities in business and politics. So far the club has hosted such luminaries as Henry Kissinger (on the first cover of *Private Clubs* in 1987), Caspar Weinberger, William F. Buckley Jr., Ronald Reagan, Charles Kuralt, and

Jeane Kirkpatrick. "It was the brainchild of Barry Evans, a former Board of Governors chairperson here," says Glen Vogel, member of the Junior Advisory Committee. "This is my sixth year with it. I've had the fortune of being here with leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Norman Schwarzkopf. It's been wonderful being a part of the series, and seeing General Powell tonight was terrific."

In October the Bankers Club welcomed Powell — solid soldier, rumored onetime presidential prospect, and the mastermind behind Operation Desert Storm. Born of immigrant parents from Jamaica, Powell was raised and educated in New York City, and was graduated from City College of New York with a degree in geology. While attending CCNY he got his first taste of the military while participating in ROTC, and upon graduation was commissioned an Army second lieutenant. Powell's distinguished military career included numerous assignments around the world. He was a battalion commander in Korea and served two tours of duty in Vietnam. He was selected as a White House fellow

General Colin Powell reminds us

in 1972. He commanded the V Corps in Germany in 1986 and served as national security adviser to President Reagan in 1987 and '88. He served as the commander in chief of Forces Command at Fort McPherson, Georgia, from April through September 1989 before becoming the 12th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense from October 1989 to September 1993, under Presidents Bush and Clinton. In this capacity he served as the principal military adviser to the president, the secretary of defense, and the National Security Council. Powell has earned numerous military decorations, including the Soldier's Medal and the Purple Heart. Among his civilian awards honoring his public service are two Presidential Medals of Freedom, the highest civilian honor. He has also received an honorary knighthood from the queen of England.



why we should be proud of our country.

*General Colin Powell served
America for three decades,
helping to defend
freedom around the world.*

Colin Powell
first appeared in *Private Clubs*
January/February 1997.

Powell retired from the U.S. Army on September 30, 1993. He spent the next two years as an author and has chronicled his life in his book, *My American Journey*. "It's in two parts: The second part, roughly the last couple of hundred pages, is a typical Washington memoir," says Powell. "I talk about working for three presidents, about matters of war and peace, working with the Congress, working with Norm Schwarzkopf. But the best part of the book is the front part, an American story about an ordinary kid from the Bronx, born of extraordinary parents and privileged to live in an extraordinary city in an extraordinary country in an extraordinary society."

Part of what makes Powell so inspiring is the uncompromising value system he says he received from his parents, values which continue to serve him today: "My parents said, 'There is a difference between right and wrong in life. And we expect you always to do that which is right and stay away from what is wrong. If you do that which is wrong it will hurt you, whether that wrong is drugs or violence or not going to school. But beyond hurting you, if you do that which is wrong, it will ultimately shame you.' They told me to have self-respect and self-esteem, regardless of my station in society. They said, 'There are places in this country where you can't get a hamburger, you can't get on a bus, you can't get a job. Most of the professions and institutions in this country are off-limits to you. But don't let that stop you.' And the capstone value was, 'Believe in America. Believe in the redemptive power of this country and of this society to change itself.'"

Powell believed in America, in spite of the fact that America didn't always believe in him. In 1958, when he first became a soldier, the Army was one of the few institutions where Powell would be judged by the job he did rather than the color of his skin. "Just a generation ago," he says, "to be a soldier was the only way a black person could rise all the way to the top, in an integrated setting based principally on his ability to perform, his ambition, his dreams, and his willingness to work hard. Look at the opportunities available today compared with 1958; it's incredible how far we've come. But yet there is still far to go."

Powell is conscious of his role as an example for American youth. He says he hopes he serves as an example for

white youth, not just African Americans, just as he says he hopes that African American youth will find inspiration in the lives of white public figures such as Schwarzkopf and Robert Dole. Powell says it's not necessary to find heroes on the playing field or the television screen. He suggests the youth of America look elsewhere: "Role models can be your parents or your teachers, or someone you drive by in the morning who's on his way to work for 14 hours a day to bring food back home. Gain inspiration and get some lessons from what other people have done, but then be a role model for yourself. Set your own standards; have your own vision."

Powell says the vision the Army had for him throughout most of his military career can be summed up in one word: containment. He says his job throughout the Cold War was to contain communism and totalitarianism and to

keep the free world safe for democracy and individual freedom, ideas Powell says epitomize the United States. During the Cold War, says Powell, "We were preparing for World War III — nuclear Armageddon. But at the same time, we understood who the enemy was. It was a predictable time — even though it was a very dangerous time. That conflict dominated the first 28 years of my military career."

His mission was a resounding success. In the past decade communism as



Powell believed in America, even

we knew it throughout the Cold War has fallen apart, and the countries of what was once called the "Evil Empire" have begun to develop their own definitions of democracy. New foes such as Iraq and Libya have replaced our old foes, and Powell says he is encouraged to see archenemies such as Israel and the PLO entering an uneasy truce.

In April 1988 Powell traveled to Russia to witness firsthand the dismantling of the Cold War. "Mikhail Gorbachev was different from any other Soviet leader," he says. "And he was saying things we'd never heard from any Russian leader: He was talking about *glasnost*, or openness, allowing ideas to cross the Iron Curtain, ideas that we knew would be more powerful than any army. He talked about *perestroika*, restructuring their economic and political systems to make them more relevant to the demands of the

This page: Powell and Secretary of State George Schultz listen as Mikhail Gorbachev ends the Cold War. Powell (opposite, with Norman Schwarzkopf) toured the war zone two weeks before the ground offensive in the Gulf War.



though America didn't always believe in him.

21st century. We listened carefully to this man. When I went to Moscow with Secretary of State George Schultz, we met with Gorbachev to plan for an upcoming summit meeting where Ronald Reagan — the creator of the term “Evil Empire” — was going to Russia for the first time in his life. And on this day we went into the Hall of St. Catherine, a gorgeous room in the Kremlin, and we sat across the table from President Gorbachev. On his side of the table he had his marshals and his ministers and his admirals and his generals. And Mr. Schultz and I were on our side of the table with just a few assistants. Gorbachev was very excited, just carrying on, and apparently he felt he wasn't getting through to us. He really got fired up. I can still see him looking across that table at us and saying, “Why won't you understand! Why won't you stop paying

attention to those right-wing kooks in the United States? Don't you realize the risks I'm taking? Don't you understand that I am playing real politics? Please understand me. Don't you know the pressure I'm under?” He looked straight across the table at Schultz and said, “Mr. Secretary, don't you understand what I am saying to you? I am ending the Cold War.” And then he sort of looked away for a minute and regained his composure. And then he turned to me. He noticed the skeptical, quizzical look on my face, and he said, “General, I am very, very sorry, but you will have to find a new enemy.”

That was only the beginning. On a November evening in 1989, the people of what was once two Germanies destroyed one of the most potent symbols of the Cold War, pushing through the Berlin Wall to shake the hands of their

fellow Berliners on the other side. "And the Russians let it happen," says Powell. "The tiny Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia rose up and said to the Soviet empire, 'We wish to be free!' And Gorbachev let them go. The Iron Curtain and the Warsaw Pact collapsed, Germany unified, and all those wonderful cavalry posts that used to be mine were suddenly turned into tourist traps. And then finally on Christmas day of 1991 the Soviet Union ended. This great empire — ended. And on that day, communism died as a functioning ideology."

The disintegration of the Soviet Union was just the first step in a global shift toward freedom and democracy, says Powell, heralding the decline of totalitarian regimes around the world. "Even though we see this terrible trouble in the Middle East now with the violence in the West Bank of Gaza," he says, "the bottom line is that Israel and the Palestinians have no choice but to reconcile. The Israeli army cannot defeat the teenagers of the West Bank, and the teenagers of the West Bank cannot defeat the Israeli defense forces. The Vietnamese thought they won a war in 1975. They've discovered that they won nothing but a failed ideology and a failed economic system. Now they're struggling to remain communists and also trying desperately to become part of the world economy. And in China 1.3 billion people are trying to find their place in the world."

In 1994 Powell traveled to Pretoria, South Africa, to see Nelson Mandela, a man who had been a prisoner of his own country for 27 years, become president. He says he watched in satisfaction as apartheid "joined communism in the dust bin of history."

"And here in our hemisphere," he says, "when I was national security adviser eight years ago, my list of problems was incredible: El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Panama, Haiti, Cuba

— all of those troubled places fomenting revolution around the region." Today all of those nations, except Cuba, have democratically elected political leaders and presidents and are moving toward market economies. "This is a time of great excitement, great hope, great optimism," says Powell. "The values that we held dear, the struggles that we fought for half a century, that dominated most of my life, have produced incredible results."

Although the "Evil Empire" has disintegrated, and democracy seems to have won the day, Powell says our American journey is far from over. He says that although we must be vigilant

seem to be looking for something, and we're not quite sure what it is. How do we get back on track? I don't have any magic solution, but I am reminded of my military experience and how we were able to instill in our units the sense of purpose, the sense of character, and the sense of what's right. I keep reflecting on Desert Storm, the great adventure of my life, when the American people formed a unique bond with those 541,000 troops that we sent 8,000 miles away from home under the command of my great friend Norman Schwarzkopf."

Powell says he is confident that if the United States can assemble 541,000

young men and women from every economic level, racial description, and gender, send them halfway around the world, and have them think of themselves as a family, then it's also possible to instill that same spirit of compassion, service, selflessness, and sacrifice for each other in communities across America. "The strategy that won the Cold War wasn't our armies," says Powell. "It was our value system, our democracy, our economic system, our belief in the potential of all human beings."

People throughout the world look to see if America's still ahead, if we are still the spring from which democracy and freedom flow. We are, and I know we can continue in this direction, because I believe that this is a unique nation — not a nation here by historic accident or Darwinism. America is a nation put here by a divine providence for a purpose, a providence that gave this land to us and told us to be good stewards of it, and to be good stewards of each other. We need to be proud of this country, and to remember that God has blessed it and told us to call it America. ■

Associate Editor Edward Pittman is grateful that throughout his life he has had Colin Powell, among many others, helping to safeguard his freedom.



In August 1990 Powell traveled to the White House to brief President Bush on the progress of the American troop buildup during Operation Desert Shield.

against terrorism, he expects fewer Desert Storms and Vietnams in the generations to come. He says that as a nation we have turned inward in the wake of the Cold War and begun to examine ourselves, rather than concentrate so much on a world that will need our military might to right wrongs less often. Powell says domestic concerns are of more immediate importance: crime, drugs, racial tension, the homeless, education, and what he says is a political system composed of two parties that are so partisan all they can do is fight each other, rather than answering the problems of the country. "During the Cold War we had a vision, but it's a little murky now," says Powell. "We