

## Powell to Brazilians: 'US Is Your Friend!'

Contributed by Collin L. Powell  
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You are the ones who are going to take over as world leaders of the future, not me. I'm an old man. I'm going to be sitting on a porch somewhere. Dozing all of the time. You are the ones who are going to have to lead Brazil. Not President Lula. The message I have brought to Brazilians, and as I talk to young people in Brazil, is that you have a friend in the United States of America.

Remarks of US State Secretary Colin L. Powell with students at the Meninos do Morumbi Youth-at-Risk after school program in São Paulo, Brazil

SECRETARY POWELL: Good morning everyone. It's a great pleasure to be with you.

STUDENTS: Good morning.

SECRETARY POWELL: Everyone speaks English, or Portuguese?

STUDENTS: Portuguese.

SECRETARY POWELL: Okay. I'll speak English, you speak Portuguese.

It's a great pleasure to be with you this morning. I very much enjoyed the performance upstairs. People all around the world love Brazilian music, and the way you have influenced so many other cultures, including my own.

Even though I'm an American, my parents came from the Caribbean, from Jamaica. So, I grew up with calypso and soca. All of that's influenced by Brazilian music and, in turn, influences Brazilian music.

But the real joy, for me also, is to be with this group, and to see behind you other kinds of instruments, called computers. And to know that one of the things you do in this wonderful facility is music and learn about yourself and work with your family and work with the people who come here to help you, but also learn how to use the computers as you prepare yourself for life in a very exciting new world.

Before I came back into the government, I was in private life and I helped build many rooms like this, in clubs, boys and girls clubs all across America. To make sure that all of our kids in America had access to this kind of technology, and they learn how to use it, and it was not just for people who were wealthy or could afford to have it in their homes. We need it for everybody to have access.

I just finished a speech with the American Chamber of Commerce. I was telling all these business leaders that you have many things to do to make a good business. But one of the things you have to make sure you do, as business leaders, as community leaders, is invest in the young people of Brazil.

Because you are the ones who are going to take over as world leaders of the future, not me. I'm an old man. I'm going to be sitting on a porch somewhere. Dozing all of the time.

You are the ones who are going to have to lead Brazil. Not President Lula. We have to make sure you are getting what you need to be successful. We have to make sure that each and every one of you know that you are valued and important.

You're as important as anyone else in the country. And we have to make sure that you are getting the education that you need, make sure that you are getting the experience that you need to be successful, and we have to make sure that you know that there is nothing you can't do, in Brazil or anywhere else, if you are willing to work for it and if you are willing to dream for it.

Our two countries are great democracies. We have a very diverse society. People are coming to America, people are coming to Brazil. We've got all kinds of colors, every one you could imagine. And we have to make sure that this diversity that we have is a source of strength, and not something that pulls us apart.

We can let a new generation take us a little further towards the path of strength in diversity, and a solid democracy. In my country, for example, I am the Secretary of State, but 50 years ago, it would have been unimaginable – 30 years ago – it would have been unimaginable to think that a black person who came from immigrant parents could be the Secretary of State or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

But it happened because we learn to grow with society. We learn to use that diversity to make us stronger.

Fifty years ago I was sitting in a room like this with young people like you and I didn't know where I was going to go. I worked hard, and believed in myself and I believed in my country. I believed that if I worked hard, and if I dreamed about something then maybe it could happen.

But I don't want to just lecture you. I'd rather listen to what you want to tell me or ask me about. I have one question. Who painted the picture over there on the wall? (Laughter.) Who'd like to ask a question?

QUESTION: (in Portuguese) My name is Elaine. I've been here five years and I'm 15 years old. I'd like to know what you thought of Meninos do Morumbi? What do you think about this institution?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think it's terrific. I'm very familiar with this kind of facility, because before I came back to the government this is what I was doing, building places like this.

It gives you a safe place to come and to learn about yourself. You have to work together. I'm a soldier, so I always think like a soldier.

When I was upstairs watching the performance, I enjoyed the music. But they also lined up like soldiers. It was like one of my old infantry companies. Everybody really had to do the right thing for the whole team to work.

That's what he's teaching, more than music. You learn as much about personal responsibility and have other people counting on you. Places like this also show you that there are people in society who really care about you.

The government, the companies like Hewlett-Packard, people who care. You have to respond. You have to pay back. You pay it back by being successful in life and when you no longer are coming here, make sure that all the lessons you learned you take with you in whatever you do.

QUESTION: (in Portuguese) My name is Ana Carolina, I'm 16 years old. What do you think of the fact that the President of Brazil started as a metal worker and rose to the presidency?

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh. That's amazing. A man who started out selling shoes, became a metal worker, his first skill, had a difficult family life, essentially minimum wage, having minimal job on the street, and then gets a skill to run a lathe.

And then from there he moves on to union work. And he believes in Brazil, he struggles for Brazil. He gets in trouble from time to time, but he keeps struggling for what he knows are his own beliefs, and he runs for president four times, fails three, and then finally succeeds. He's president of the country, which says a lot about him. And it also says a lot about

Brazil.

The lesson to you is whatever you are given to do, whether it's to shine shoes or run a lathe, do it well, become an expert in it. And then see what comes next.

When I was your age and I was going to school, I also worked at a bottling plant, making Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, mopping floors in a Pepsi-Cola plant.

It's not fun to mop a floor after 50 cases of Pepsi-Cola have spilled on the floor and they hand you a mop and say, "clean it up."

But I cleaned it up, that was my job. And I did it well. And the guy says, "You're the best guy with a mop we've ever had.

And now we're going to give you something else to see if you can do it as well." My entire career has been like that. So you see, if you start mopping floors today, you could be Foreign Minister of Brazil.

QUESTION: (in Portuguese) I want to know if in your life, your career, you suffered from racial prejudice?

SECRETARY POWELL: In the early days of my career, in the mid 50's, late 50's, when I came into the Army it had only been eight years after they desegregated the Army, so that black people could serve with white people. I was the first generation of black soldiers that was not kept in an all black unit.

Although the law had changed, attitudes had not changed. So, many of my commanders and many people who I worked with still saw me as a black person, and therefore below them.

I was a good officer, and one of my commanders once said to me, "now, you're a good lieutenant. You're the best black lieutenant I've ever met." He only saw me as a black lieutenant.

I said, "Thank you very much." But, I said to myself silently, "Before I finish, I'm going to be the best lieutenant you ever saw, black or white."

He wanted to limit me, but I refused to let him. He had a stereotype about me, and I had to change his stereotype. He was the one with the problem, not me.

Never let your color, or race, or your background or where you came from be your problem. The simple solution is to outperform. Get the skills you need, if it's skills, whatever skills, language skills, learning to speak your language well, communicate well, write well, and get the skills you need to outperform. Through outperformance you will destroy whatever stereotypes people have about you.

QUESTION: (in Portuguese) My name is Ellen. I'm 16 years old. I've been here with Meninos do Morumbi for two and a half years. And I'd like to know the Secretary's opinion on the Kyoto Treaty.

(Laughter.)

SECRETARY POWELL: We don't support the Kyoto Treaty, as you know. It's not because the United States does not understand the challenge presented to us by global warming. It is a problem. It is something we have to work on.

And we are doing many things with respect to technology, with respect to scientific expenditures to find solutions, with respect to cutting down our own emissions.

We just didn't think the Kyoto Treaty was the right way to approach the problem. To deal with the problem we need a different set of solutions that are more appropriate than the Kyoto Treaty.

QUESTION: (in Portuguese) I'm Jefferson. I'm 16 years old. And I'd like to know the Secretary's view, or rather as a public official, what advice would you give to us so that we choose the best people possible to lead our country?

SECRETARY POWELL: You have a wonderful country in which you elect all your officials. And you had an excellent democratic election over the weekend.

Listen carefully to what they have to say. Have standards in your mind. Have objectives in your mind that you wish politicians would follow. Measure them against what you want. And not just what they tell you they're going to do.

Measure them against what you want to see happen. That's what democracy's about. And hold them to the highest standards of accountability.

We have time for one more question.

QUESTION: (in Portuguese) I'm Tatiana. I'm 17 years old. And I have one more question. What is the message you would like to leave with the Brazilian youth as you pass through?

SECRETARY POWELL: Be proud of your country. Be proud of the democracy which you have. Protect it. Just remember that while you measure politicians, ultimately you are the ones who are the instruments of change. You are the ones who will be affecting your democracy as you grow up.

As you are 17, 18,15, it's not going to be that long – five, ten years – when responsibility will come your way. Make sure you are ready for it.

Make sure you are preparing yourselves to speak for yourselves. And know that you will always find a good friend in the United States of America. We sometimes will have disagreements, but that's what friends have from time to time, even the best of friends.

But the message I have brought to Brazilians, and as I talk to young people in Brazil, is that you have a friend in the United States of America.

Thank you very much. Can we take a group picture?

US State Department