



THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

WHITE HOUSE HISTORY | *Timelines : African-Americans and the White House*

1790s

Construction on the President's House began in 1792 in Washington, D.C., a new capital situated in sparsely settled region far from a major population center. The decision to place the capital on land ceded by two slave states—Virginia and Maryland—ultimately influenced the acquisition of laborers to construct its public buildings. The D.C. commissioners, charged by Congress with building the new city under the direction of the president, initially planned to import workers from Europe to meet their labor needs. However, response to recruitment was dismal and soon they turned to African Americans – slave and free – to provide the bulk of labor that built the White House, the United States Capitol, and other early government buildings.

A major concern in the construction of the new public buildings in this remote location was the acquisition of building materials, such as stone, lumber, bricks, hardware, and nails. Black quarrymen, sawyers, brickmakers, and carpenters fashioned raw materials into the products used to erect the White House. Master stonemason, Colleen Williamson, trained slaves on the spot at the government's quarry at Aquia, Virginia. There slaves quarried and cut the rough stone that was later dressed and laid by Scottish stonecutters to erect the walls of the President's House. Sawyers listed on government payrolls, such as "Jerry", "Jess", "Charles", "Len", "Dick", "Bill" and "Jim" undoubtedly were slaves leased from their masters. Free and slave blacks burnt bricks used to line the stone walls in temporary ricks on the President's House grounds. Often working seven days a week during the high construction summer months alongside white workers and artisans, black laborers proved vital to the work force that created both the White House and U.S. Capitol.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; Robert J. Kapsch, "Building Liberty's Capital," *American Visions*, February/March 1995, 8-10.



1800s

The White House is a large structure and from its earliest days domestic operations have demanded a general manager. For this purpose President Thomas Jefferson, through his two administrations, relied heavily on his French steward Etienne Lemaire. There were two other white servants, Julien, a French chef, and Joseph Dougherty, an Irish coachman. The remainder of Jefferson's regular household staff, which numbered a dozen, included slaves from Monticello. Even under the best management this was a small staff. However, in the early years the president paid his household personally. The domestic "offices" and servants' quarters were located in the rooms of the basement. Kitchen staff, directly under the Entrance Hall, cooked busily all day providing food for servants, staff, and any guests who might be visiting.

Jefferson's style of living was simpler than that of many rich citizens along the eastern seaboard. His one concession to grandeur was to dress his menservants in livery, knee breeches, and gilt or steel-buttoned blue coats with crimson trimmings and lace edging. Although Jefferson wrote his daughter that he preferred white servants so that he could dismiss them when they misbehaved, he did care for his slaves. When a sickly child was born at the President's House (11 months after Jefferson's own grandson, James Madison Randolph) to slaves Fanny and Eddy in 1806, he provided for the nursing care of the baby and mother. Sadly, the child died before its second birthday.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986.

1810s

Paul Jennings, who was born a slave on President James Madison's estate at Montpelier in 1799, was a "body servant" who attended the president until his death in 1836. Jennings later purchased his freedom from Daniel Webster. Webster acquired Jennings from Pollard Webb who in turn bought the manservant from Dolley Madison in 1846. After meeting the terms of his agreement with Webster, Jennings became a free man and found work at the Department of the Interior. In 1865, Jennings published, *Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*, the first memoir about the White House by one who had lived there. The publication remained obscure for many years because it was printed in a limited edition, but today it is acknowledged by scholars as a classic. It provided details about one of the most critical periods in the history of the city of Washington—the War of 1812—and the formation of the city's enterprising free Negro community in the antebellum period. It also recounted Jennings's involvement in a plan in 1848 to undertake a large-scale escape of slaves from the capital aboard the schooner Pearl.



1820s

The African American staff, and other servants, who lived at the President's House, most often had rooms in the basement. Open at ground level on the south, the basement (referred to as the ground floor today) had windows on the north facing a deep areaway that was entirely hidden from view. Visitors on the public tour of the White House walk through the long cross-hall of this space with rooms opening to the sides. Today the rooms are used as a Library, China Room, offices, and the formal oval Diplomatic Reception Room. However, this vaulted corridor once accessed a great kitchen 40 feet long with large fireplaces at each end, a family kitchen, an oval servants hall, the steward's quarters, storage and work rooms, and the servants' bedrooms. An inventory for the year 1826, during John Quincy Adams' administration, records the typical furniture used by servants in the first half of the 19th century. For example, the cook slept on a cot, and had a pine wardrobe and a pine table; other servants' rooms were similar, with cots and mattresses and "low post" bedsteads, blankets, and sheets; sometimes they had benches, chairs, and tables. Often the furniture was described as "worn out" or "in want of repair."

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; William Seale, "Upstairs and Downstairs: The 19th-Century White House," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 16-20.

1830s

President Andrew Jackson was a slaveholder who brought a large household of slave domestics with him from Tennessee to the President's House. Many of them lived in the servant's quarters, but the president's body servant slept in the room with him. Jackson's servants worked under Rachel Jackson's management at his Tennessee home for the better part of their lives and were country folk. Mrs. Jackson died before her husband began his first term. At the President's House these slaves came under the direction of the steward Belgian Antoine Michel Giusta, a holdover from the Adams administration. Most of the lower level white servants were replaced by slaves who wore the livery of blue coats with brass buttons, white shirts, and yellow or white breeches. Maids, who did not appear in the public rooms, used a long white apron, reaching to hems at the floor. Giusta did not like Jackson or his black servants and left the president's service in 1834. Another Belgian, Joseph Boulanger, became the steward. Boulanger apparently did not live at the White House and when he was away, the black doorkeeper Jemmy O'Neil, a great favorite of Jackson's, kept the keys to the house. He had a porter's lodge to the right of the north door with a perspective onto the Entrance Hall where he monitored the comings and goings of the public.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; William Seale, "Upstairs and Downstairs: The 19th-Century White House," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 16-20.



1840s

When John Adams moved into the White House in November 1800, one-third of the capital city's population was black. Few of these African Americans were free. However, with the end of the African slave trade in 1808 and the depletion of lands and decline of Tidewater tobacco plantations, free African Americans became more common and soon outnumbered the city's slave population. On the eve of the Civil War, the census recorded that the city of Washington had 9,029 free blacks and 1,774 slaves. Although free blacks outnumbered slave residents, slave sales were still common, and Washington became a flourishing center for trade in slaves bound for the lands opened by the Louisiana Purchase. The slave pens of traders were located near the Mall and at Lafayette Square within sight of the White House. The trade finally was outlawed by the Compromise of 1850 and abolition of slavery in the District came in 1862.

For free blacks in Washington, D.C. life was better than many places below the Mason-Dixon Line. Formal education was easier to acquire (black-established schools dated to 1807), property ownership was possible, and some government jobs (usually messengers and door-keepers) were open to blacks. Most found work as laborers, servants, barbers, cooks, maids, and gardeners. However, municipal codes placed late night curfews on blacks and required them to register and to carry a certificate of freedom. Without this proof a black could be jailed as a runaway slave. The registration certificate was a precious document as it checked the over-zealous slave traders and kidnappers in the city. Although it was a hard life, free blacks persevered and by the time of the Civil War had established a flourishing African American community.

Read More: Henry Chase, "Black Life in the Capital," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 14-15; Constance Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*, Princeton, 1967.

1850s

In the 1850s, African Americans were dismissed from the White House ranks, not to be seen again until after the Civil War. President James Buchanan's household staff was entirely white. Buchanan specified that the new employees were to be British. He believed that people trained in the British system of domestic service would be less of a threat to his privacy and peace of mind. In his view, they were accustomed to big houses and loyalty was part of their ethic. Except for the butler, Pierre Vermereu, who was Belgian, all of the servants living under the Buchanan roof were from England, Ireland, and Wales. Some of these continued in service during Lincoln's administration.

William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986



1860s

During the Lincoln Administration some of Buchanan's British-born domestic staff remained and other workers were brought from Illinois. There were no slaves as servants. Joining them in the White House, although she was not a member of the staff, was African American Elizabeth Keckley. She was a former slave and a talented seamstress who had bought her freedom and moved to Washington, D.C. where she established a dressmaking business. Keckley became Mary Todd Lincoln's seamstress and eventually a close friend and confidante. In his office on January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation as a war measure. That summer President Lincoln invited abolitionist Frederick Douglass to the White House to discuss emancipation and the recruitment and arming of black troops. On October 29, 1864, Lincoln met with Sojourner Truth, a fiery advocate of abolition and women's rights. These political meetings were important precedents for blacks and influenced White House policy.

A notable African American to work at the White House in the 1860s was William Slade who had been a messenger in the Treasury Department. According to his daughter, Slade became Abraham Lincoln's personal messenger and friend. By 1866, Slade, was a fixture at the White House, and became President Andrew Johnson's steward. This federal official was in charge of the domestic management of the White House and responsible for the furnishings, silver, and other public property. Slade was the first official steward of the White House. It was a powerful and delicate position that called for the ability to communicate with politicians and officials as well as with the family and servants.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; William Seale, "Upstairs and Downstairs: The 19th-Century White House," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 16-20; Adele Logan Alexander, "White House Confidante of Mrs. Lincoln," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 18; and Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*, Reprint edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

1870s

Frederick Douglass was one of the foremost leaders of the abolitionist movement and advised Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War on issues related to emancipation and the treatment of black troops. In 1866, Douglass, at the head of a delegation, called on President Andrew Johnson in the East Room and appealed for his support to back voting rights for black men. Johnson refused to use his dwindling political capital to assist African Americans. In 1877 Rutherford B. Hayes made Douglass a marshal of the District of Columbia, but he would not allow him to present guests to the president, as had been the custom. However, Douglass did serve as the master of ceremonies when black entertainers performed at the White House. Douglass was appointed American consul general to Haiti in 1889. He was the most famous African American of the 19th century and is regarded as the father of the civil rights movement. Yet, no matter how famous or accomplished, many decades passed before blacks would be invited to the White House for social and state functions.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; Henry Chase, "Memorable Visitors: Classic White House Encounters," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 26-33.



1880s

For most of the 19th century, the structure of the White House staff remained generally the same. At the top was the steward, a federal employee who was bonded; the Congress created this position to safeguard the silver and furnishings in the house. The steward was on the government payroll. He functioned as the manager of the house. The job required patience, administrative ability, shrewdness as a purchasing agent, and a deep sense of discretion. Beneath him were the maids, footmen, cooks and laborers. About one-third of the servants lived in the White House in the basement rooms, some dormitory, some private. The steward dealt directly with each employee and there was no specific hierarchy. Most of the servants were southern blacks who had entered the president's service after a similar experience in a hotel or private residence—or through a family connection, a brother, sister, parent, or aunt already there. The tone of the house was distinctly southern; the pace was slow, the relationships personal, and the social life characterized by comfortable elegance. It would be difficult to imagine the White House interior in the 19th century without the presence of African Americans, who performed a thousand duties.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; William Seale, "Upstairs and Downstairs: The 19th-Century White House," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 16-20.

1890s

Beginning with James Buchanan's administration in the 1850s, black entertainers have held a prime spot among White House performers. Their contribution to the musical history of the White House has been a rich and generally little known segment of American cultural life. A performance by Thomas Greene Bethune, "Blind Tom" created a sensation in 1859. Although blind and mentally retarded, he possessed extraordinary musical gifts and is said to have played like Beethoven, Gottschalk and Mozart. In 1878, diva Marie ("Selika") Williams appears to have been the earliest black artist to present a musical program at the White House. The Fisk Jubilee Singers introduced the "spiritual" as an American art form and came to the White House as part of a tour in 1882 that raised funds to benefit Fisk University. They became the first black choir to perform at the White House and their performance of "Safe in the Arms of Jesus," moved President Chester Arthur to tears. Another great performer was Sissieretta Jones (Black Patti), the daughter of a former slave, who sang opera arias and ballads for the Harrisons in 1892. A sensational vocalist, Jones received rave reviews and fame in a career that included performances at the White House for the Harrisons, McKinleys and Theodore Roosevelts. Black entertainers in the 19th century established a grand tradition of performance that evolved to embrace every variety of music—from opera to gospel and from jazz to symphonic.

Read More: Elise Kirk, "Black Performers: A Picture History," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 22-25; Elise Kirk, *Musical Highlights from the White House*, Krieger, 1992.



1900s

Theodore Roosevelt became president after the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901. The early months of his administration were a tense period of trial and error as Roosevelt had not been elected president. Fond of dinners as a means of entertaining, the Roosevelts held them nearly every night over the last few months of 1901 and constructed the guest lists with an eye to politics. One of these early dinners put White House hospitality on the front pages. This dinner actually occurred a few days before the official period of mourning for McKinley had ended. On October 16, Roosevelt had among his guests the educator Booker T. Washington, whose autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, was then highly popular. Roosevelt often invited people to dinner to discuss public affairs when the day's meeting calendar was too full. Washington arrived with an invitation at the north door promptly at eight. In the Blue Room he joined his fellow dinner guest, Philip B. Stewart of Colorado. Dinner was probably served in the State Dining Room since the party was in evening dress. The guests remembered a simple, cordial evening. The next morning following a news release of the White House guest list, the event sparked the hottest news since the McKinley assassination. Editorials in the South—but not only the South—were harsh in their criticism of Roosevelt. The furor over the dinner—the first time that an African American was entertained at the White House—revealed the structure's symbolic power and the bigotry then at large in the nation.

Read more: William Seale, *The President's House*, White House Historical Association, 1986; Henry Chase, "Memorable Visitors: Classic White House Encounters," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 26-33.

1910s

Civil Rights activist and journalist William Monroe Trotter caused a stir in 1914 because he strongly protested President Woodrow Wilson's support for segregation of black federal employees in the workplace. Trotter came to the White House as a founder and representative of the National Independent Political League, a militant organization that fought for racial and social justice, and the publisher of *The Guardian*, a Boston newspaper dedicated to the fight against racial discrimination. In a meeting with Wilson, Trotter directly challenged the president for permitting the segregation of black and white government clerks. Angered by this confrontation that questioned his integrity, President Wilson declared himself "offended" and had Trotter removed from the White House. Trotter then took his case to the press and ridiculed the president for introducing segregation into the federal work force as a means to prevent racial friction. The activist noted that black and white clerks had worked together without problems for more than 50 years. Trotter devoted his career to the fight against racial discrimination and to the development of independent political action in the black community. He led numerous non-violent protests and demonstrations against conservative black leaders like Booker T. Washington for being too accommodating and attacked films and plays that glorified the Ku Klux Klan. At that time Trotter's confrontational tactics were highly controversial, but his activism and approach became a model for the Civil Rights Movement from 1940 to 1970.

Read more: Henry Chase, "Memorable Visitors: Classic White House Encounters," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 26-33.



1920s

Oscar De Priest's election to Congress as a Republican representative from Chicago in 1928 created an interesting political and social dilemma for the White House. De Priest was the only black to serve in Congress during his three terms (1928-1935). Even before De Priest took his seat in 1929, Washington buzzed about the arrival of a black congressman and what this meant to the strict segregation that pervaded life in the capital. Several southern members refused office assignments adjacent to De Priest and the possible invitation of Mrs. De Priest to the traditional White House tea for congressional wives teas sparked controversy. Eventually, Lou Hoover arranged a separate tea party for Mrs. De Priest at the White House with a few chosen guests. However, the appearance of a black woman as a guest at the executive residence created a stir and drew strident protests from the South. As in 1901 with Booker T. Washington's visit, the White House's powerful role as a national symbol aroused the ire of Southerners who did not want the impression conveyed that the nation would sanction the social equality of the races.

Read more: Henry Chase, "Memorable Visitors: Classic White House Encounters," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 26-33.

1930s

One of the most memorable performances in White House history was Marian Anderson's rendition of Schubert's "Ave Maria" as the culmination of a gala "Evening of American Music" presented by Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939. The entertainment was planned for a state visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of England. Anderson's powerful voice soared that evening. Arturo Toscanini once remarked that Anderson was a talent that "comes once in a hundred years." Anderson had performed "Ave Maria" just a few months earlier as the climax to an outdoor concert that moved to tears the audience of 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial. That concert was arranged on the Mall because the Daughters of the American Revolution refused her a singing engagement at Constitution Hall because she was black. Mrs. Roosevelt immediately resigned from the DAR and invited Anderson to sing for the British royals despite bitter criticism from segregationists.

Read More: Elise Kirk, "Black Performers: A Picture History," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 22-25; Elise Kirk, *Musical Highlights from the White House*, Krieger, 1992.



1940s

Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball on April 15, 1947 signaling a historic step forward in the movement to end segregation. However, a less conspicuous event of greater significance to African Americans was President Truman's controversial 1948 executive order desegregating the military and banning discriminatory hiring practices in the federal government. Issued in an election year, the executive order was a bold move that thrilled African Americans and outraged Southern whites. Truman held to a strong plank for civil rights in the Democratic platform that resulted in a walkout by Southern Democrats who formed the States Rights Democratic Party. The "Dixiecrats" nominated South Carolina's Strom Thurmond as their presidential candidate. Despite the party split, Truman's bold endorsement of civil rights enabled the president to attain the votes of African Americans in northern cities in several key electoral states, which contributed to his dramatic victory over Republican Thomas Dewey in 1948.

1950s

E. Frederic Morrow was the first African American to serve in an executive position on a president's staff at the White House. Morrow was a minister's son who had graduated from Bowdoin College and was employed by the National Urban League and the NAACP before entering Army service during World War II. After the war, he obtained a law degree from Rutgers University and worked for the public affairs division at CBS. He was an adviser on business affairs in the Commerce Department before joining Eisenhower's staff as Administrative Officer for Special Projects from 1955 to 1961. As the sole African American on a staff dealing with racial tensions related to integration, Morrow faced difficult personal and professional struggles at the White House. The Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education* ruling, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the Little Rock crisis were the backdrop for Morrow's White House years. On a staff with a civil-rights policy that was at best cautious, Morrow was often frustrated and angered. He lived at a time when qualified African Americans were excluded from high-level political positions. Morrow as a black "first" found relations within the president's "official family" to be "correct in conduct, but cold." He published his autobiography, *Black Man in the White House*, in 1963 leaving a valuable account of his experience as a black man working in the president's inner circle, including his disappointment with the indecision of Eisenhower's civil rights policy.

E. Frederic Morrow, *Black Man in the White House*, Coward-McCann, 1963



1960s

A master of the art of practical politics, Lyndon Johnson came into the White House after the tragedy of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. He was energetic, shrewd, and hugely ambitious. Clifford Alexander, Jr., deputy counsel to the president and an African American, remembered President Johnson as a larger-than-life figure who was a tough but fair taskmaster. His legislative program "had such a positive effect on black Americans [it] was breathtaking when compared to the miniscule efforts of the past." The cornerstones of that program were the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Civil rights leaders from across America led by Martin Luther King, Jr. gathered in the East Room of the White House to witness the signing of the Civil Rights Act that signified a major victory in the struggle for racial equality to which they had dedicated their lives. President Johnson also made two political appointments—Robert Weaver as secretary of Housing and Urban Development and Thurgood Marshall as associate Supreme Court justice. For the first time African Americans had positions in the Cabinet and on the Supreme Court. President Johnson appointed more black judges than any president before him and opened the White House not only to black athletes and performers but also to black religious, civic and political leaders in significant numbers. Johnson saw his place in history as being directly related to the improvement of race relations in America and according to Alexander "he was a huge success."

Read more: Clifford Alexander, Jr., "Black Memoirs of the White House--LBJ," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 42-43.

1970s

During his tenure in office President Nixon steered a middle course in domestic affairs and did not attempt to dismantle Johnson's programs but strived to make them more efficient. Robert J. Brown was an African American member of Nixon's White House staff who was looked to as liaison to the black community. He dealt with issues related to civil rights legislation, funding for jobs, black colleges and inner-city housing. Racial tensions were high in 1970, as blacks became frustrated with economic conditions that did not improve despite advancements in civil rights. The Nixon administration addressed the underlying problems of bigotry and economic empowerment by putting teeth in anti-discriminatory laws, boosting the budget of civil rights enforcement, and sponsoring minority business initiatives. Brown recalled that one of his priorities as a Nixon staffer was to promote black colleges. He arranged a series of meetings between Nixon and black college presidents, "knowing that the president saw education as a great equalizer." President Nixon doubled aid to black colleges and issued an executive order denying tax deductions for contributions to segregated schools. John Calhoun, a black special assistant to President Ford, would continue this concern for the status and funding of black colleges. He strongly supported the Ford administration's efforts to renew the Voting Rights Act and to improve the funding and research capabilities of black colleges. President Ford backed Calhoun's efforts to reach out and to work with African American members and staffers on Capitol Hill. Calhoun held monthly luncheon meetings. This outreach program and Calhoun's access to the president was significant to shaping decisions concerning busing, school desegregation and voting rights.

Read more: Robert J. Brown "Black Memoirs of the White House--Nixon," 44-45 and John Calhoun, "Black Memoirs of the White House--Ford," *American Visions*, February-March, 1995, 46-47.



1980s

On August 10, 1989, President Bush announced his appointment of General Colin Powell as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Powell became the architect of Operation Desert Shield, a staging operation that moved American and international forces and materials to the Middle East to launch Operation Desert Storm. As President Bush's trusted advisor, Powell helped shape a global alliance that executed the most intricate and high-tech military campaign in history. This operation reversed the invasion of Kuwait and defeated the Iraqi army. Powell served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff until 1993. He had been a White House Fellow in 1972, worked as an executive assistant in the Energy and Defense departments during the Carter administration, served as senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger, and was President Reagan's National Security Advisor from 1987 to 1989. Powell, a son of Jamaican immigrants, was born on April 5, 1937, in Harlem, New York. He attended the public schools of New York and graduated from the City College of New York in 1958. While at the college he joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps and received a commission as second lieutenant upon graduation. After basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, he embarked on a military career that took him to operational and command assignments in the United States, Germany, Vietnam, and Korea and culminated in his appointment as the first black officer to hold the nation's highest military post.

1990s

Over the 20th century hundreds of people have worked behind the scenes at the White House preparing family meals, serving elaborate State Dinners, tending the grounds and welcoming visitors. Today, a household staff of approximately 90 full-time domestic and maintenance employees—including butlers, maids, engineers, housemen, chefs, electricians, florists, ushers, doormen, carpenters and plumbers—work together under one roof to operate, maintain and preserve the 132-room residence. Many of these workers are African Americans who have spent decades employed at the White House. For example, Lillian Rogers Parks (seamstress/maid 1929-1961) first came to the White House as a young girl helping her mother, a White House maid, during the Taft administration. She and other longtime workers, such as Alonzo Fields (butler and maitre d' 1931-1962), Preston Bruce (doorman 1953-1976), and Eugene Allen (chief butler and maitre d' 1952-1987), have been an integral part of and helped define the culture of the White House. They served the White House and represented the nation through their labor as seamstress and maid, butlers or maitre'd with dignity, wisdom and pride. Alonzo Fields, a butler and maitre'd at the White House for 21 years, eloquently observed: "I didn't feel like a servant to a man. I felt I was a servant to my government, to my country."

The year 2000 marks the 200th anniversary of both life and work at the White House. The integral role of African Americans at the White House at every level, both on the domestic and political staffs, will continue to shape the creation and cultivation of one of American democracy's greatest symbols.

Read More: *Workers at the White House*, Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution, 1992.



2000s

President George W. Bush selected prominent African Americans to fill key positions in his cabinet and administration. Colin L. Powell was nominated and confirmed as the Secretary of State and Rod Paige became the Secretary of Education. Dr. Condoleezza Rice was appointed as the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Powell and Rice have played vital roles in advising the president on foreign policy and security following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama was elected President of the United States. In February 2009 the Harvard Gazette noted, “It was just over two weeks ago in Washington, D.C., that the United States crossed a historic racial divide to inaugurate Obama as its first African-American president.” Professor David King, expert on elections and a lecturer in public policy at Harvard (where President Obama earned his law degree), “ranked Obama’s election . . . with just a handful of watershed presidencies : . . . Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.”

Source: Alvin Powell, Harvard Gazette, February 5, 2009

