

# A Star Arrives in Texas

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—“Diversity is about recognizing that every human is a gift to a community...Diversity is strength,” General Colin Powell (ret.) told a standing room only crowd of more than 2,000 at the Third Annual Texas Diversity and Leadership Conference at the Dallas Convention Center in May.

Anticipation, excitement and an overall sense of awe grew in the days leading up to Powell’s keynote address. The Texas Diversity Council, a fledgling organization started three years ago by Dennis Kennedy, fielded calls questioning the authenticity of Powell’s visit. “Yes, yes, General Colin Powell is speaking at our conference,” Kennedy told inquiring minds.

When the long-awaited day came, Powell impressed a very lucky group of 25 attendees, by sharing handshakes and smiles at a VIP reception hosted by AT&T. Cameras captured once-in-a-lifetime memories. Then this star of diversity and inclusion, a national leader, skilled diplomat and role model for hundreds of thousands of people of color, took the stage.

Powell enthralled the audience with his personal experiences with Affirmative Action and his struggle for inclusion in his early Army days. While the U.S. Military, he said, was at the forefront of creating diversity and acceptance, that didn’t keep his fellow soldiers from attributing his promotions to the color of his skin.

Proud of his black heritage and the sacrifice of those who had gone before him, Powell paid less attention to the “why” behind a promotion and focused on the opportunity at hand. The general chooses to look at life “through the windshield” and not the “rear-view mirror,” he said. A simple philosophy he urged the audience to adopt as well.



“America is a nation of nations, made up of people from every land, of every race, and practicing every faith. Our diversity is not a source of weakness, it is a source of strength, it is a source of our success,” Powell said.

Powell’s personal success story, as a superb diplomat and purveyor of democratic values, arose from opportunities earned and personal choices he made throughout his career. As a result Powell is compelled to give other people, from all walks of life, opportunities to be successful as well. Diversity and inclusion play an integral role.

Powell’s illustrious career led him to become a four-star general, earn two Presidential Medals of Freedom, and serve as the first African American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and as the U.S. Secretary of State.

For the Texas Diversity Council, in just its third year of existence, Powell’s keynote address allows the organization to go beyond “preaching to the choir” and broaden the conversation about inclusion and diversity in the state of Texas, Kennedy said.

“General Powell was able to bring in the whole community, which was really important if you want to have a dialogue on diversity,” Kennedy said. “This was a strong message of inclusion from a global leader.”



As inspirational as Powell’s address was to attendees, Kennedy was equally motivated after a 20-minute, one-on-one chat before the general’s speech. Kennedy will always remember Powell asserting that passivity won’t bring about change. Kennedy left the room that day understanding he had to dig even deeper if he wanted to make a difference.

“I was really encouraged and slightly taken aback to hear him discuss diversity and tell me I had to be aggressive,” Kennedy said. “Has it caused me to be more aggressive? I believe it has.”

Kennedy has stepped up his plans to grow the Texas Diversity Council into a national organization. Topics previously untouched by diversity and inclusion education are now covered in earnest. “Honestly, I was already pretty aggressive, but to hear it come from General Colin Powell’s mouth is really encouraging and a challenge we are ready to meet,” Kennedy said.

By: Beth Douglass Silcox

**“Diversity is strength.”  
—General Colin Powell**