Written by Ambassador Susan E. Rice , U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At Howard University's 145th Convocation, September 28, 2012.
Friday, 07 December 2012 10:40

In my own family, that legacy of oppression overcome weighed on my late father, Emmett Rice. He was a brilliant, proud man-an economics professor a senior official at the Treasury Department and the World Bank, and a Governor of the Federal Reserve Board. But his life of service came despite ferocious odds. My dad grew up between the wars in segregated South Carolina, and he never forgot the sting of separate and unequal. He served our country proudly in World War II, as an officer with the Tuskegee Airmen, but he forever resented the irony and inequity of fighting for freedom in a stubbornly segregated military. Dad had to learn to believe in himself by himself, to dismiss the taunting message of Jim Crow that he was somehow less of a man. He overcame that trauma-but he never forgot that he had to endure it. Throughout his career, Dad sought to lift up others so they could seize the opportunities he was almost denied.

In 1912, my mother's parents emigrated from Jamaica to Portland, Maine.

With little formal education, my grandfather took the best job he could get-as a janitor . My grandmother was a maid and a seamstress . But my grandparents managed to scrap and save to send all five of their children to college -- four sons to Bowdoin and my mom, Lois, to Harvard-Radcliffe where she was student government president . Mom, in turn, devoted her distinguished career to making higher education more accessible to all.

I am here today because of these profoundly American stories of struggle and success. I wish my grandfather could have imagined, as he bent over his broom, that his granddaughter would someday serve in the cabinet of the first African-American President of the United States. For

President Obama and I come from the next generation-what the President calls the Joshua generation. Our generation didn't just look out over Canaan. We crossed the river and entered the Promised Land. We are working, as Dr. King put it, to redeem the promissory note from the architects of our republic.

That is a profound shift. Despite all his achievements, my father never stopped believing that segregation had kept him from being all he could be. He was determined, above all, that his children not bear that same psychological baggage. And, thankfully, we did not. Between generations, after the dogs of Birmingham and the buses of Montgomery, America changed. For my brother and me, for the President and First Lady, we of the Joshua generation came of age believing the old limits didn't apply.

New doors were open. And, we've seen African-Americans become secretary of state, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, attorney general, Fortune 500 CEOs, Supreme Court justices, astronauts and, of course, President of the United States. And as you well know, many of these trailblazers are proud Howard alumni.

Today, nothing is impossible. When I look at you all, I see yet another generation, bursting with confidence and promise. I see the generation after Joshua.