

Why I serve: Racquel Russell

Written by Joyce Jones, BET
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It's not unusual for people at various stages in their careers to pay a few dues in the public sector, make some great contacts and then move on to more lucrative pastures. But Racquel Russell, who has worked with some of Washington's biggest power brokers – from former secretary of state Madeleine Albright to President Barack Obama – has never viewed her professional trajectory through that lens.

A native of Bronx, New York, Russell currently serves as Obama's deputy assistant for Urban Affairs and Economic Mobility. Her mission is to help create ladders of opportunity for struggling families in such areas as housing, transportation and anti-poverty and nutrition programs.

In Obama's first term, she helped expand Promise Neighborhoods which replicates the success of programs already in existence like the Harlem Children's Zone that provide an educational and career pipeline for parents and children in high-poverty neighborhoods. Previously, she helped craft key portions of Obama's signature legislation, the Affordable Care Act.

Russell was bitten by the political bug at a very young age, and a favorite uncle was the carrier.

"I saw him as somewhat of a Renaissance man who instilled in me a love for music, literature and politics," she said in an interview with BET.com. "I remember times when he would pull me, a 12-year-old, from playing outside in the street and he, his son and I would watch a Senate or House floor debate on C-SPAN. He nurtured this love of public service and politics from a very young age and it's something that stuck with me."

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