RICE GIVES CANDID ACCOUNT OF PERSONAL, POLITICAL LIFE IN ‘TOUGH LOVE’

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REVIEW

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On June 5, 2013, President Barack Obama announced that Susan Rice would succeed Tom Donilon as National Security Advisor. After reviewing Rice’s experience on the NSC staff, as assistant secretary of state and ambassador to the United Nations, Obama praised her as a consummate public servant and patriot.

“She is fearless; she is tough,” he said. “She has a great tennis game and a pretty good basketball game. Her brother [Johnny], is here, who I play with occasionally, and it runs in the family – throwing the occasional elbow – but hitting the big shot.”
JAMAICAN DESCENT

In “Tough Love,” Rice provides an assessment of her career in the Clinton and Obama administrations. And she explains how she reached the top echelons of the foreign policy establishment in the United States. Remarkably candid, especially about her personal life, “Tough Love” is illuminating and, at times, inspiring.

Rice was descended from Jamaicans who migrated to Maine and slaves from South Carolina. Her parents became eminently successful professionals.

Valedictorian at Portland High School, Phi Beta Kappa and student body president at Radcliffe, Lois Dickson Rice served as a senior administrator for the College Entrance Examination Board, where she won acclaim as “the Mother of Pell Grants.”

Emmett Rice ran the Statistics Department at the Tuskegee Army Air Force Base during World War II, completed a Ph.D. in Economics at UC Berkeley, and was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the Federal Reserve Board, the second African American governor in American history.

PARENTAL LESSONS

Emmett and Lois Rice gave Susan an excellent education – National Cathedral School for Girls, a B.A. at Stanford, a Ph.D. at Oxford – “and other rare opportunities.”

Most important, Susan emphasizes, her parents taught her not to blame race discrimination for her own failures or use race unfairly to her advantage. And that she and Johnny “needed to be twice as good as the next (White) kid, because that is what it would take to be considered almost equal.”

Alas, Mr. and Mrs. Rice were also locked in an unhappy union that took a toll on their children before (and after) it ended, but also provided Susan with life lessons about how to balance the responsibilities of marriage, motherhood, and caregiver with leadership in an all-consuming, male-dominated profession.

SETTLES SOME SCORES

In “Tough Love,” Rice tells us about her struggles to retain her breastfeeding capacity while on an extended diplomatic mission to Africa; the political odyssey of Jake, her son, from support for far-left presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich in 2008 to Ted Cruz in 2016; and the impact of Emmett’s strokes and surgeries and Lois’ multiple bouts with cancer.
As she reviews American foreign policy, Rice takes us inside “situation rooms” for glimpses of how the sausage is made.

Tough on herself for being too tough on her colleagues, she also settles some scores.

In her 2002 book, “A Problem from Hell,” Rice writes, Samantha Power (then a journalist and later Obama’s ambassador to the U.N.) reported that she had opposed applying the term “genocide” to Rwanda because of its domestic political implications even though she had emphatically told Power the allegation was untrue. Rice also gives voice to her “unabated anger” at Bill Daley, Clinton’s Chief of Staff, for shouting at her for “starting a f—g war [in Libya] and then going on vacation in the Caribbean.”

ON OBAMA’S POLICIES

Rice lays out some of her disagreements with Obama’s foreign policies but, not surprisingly, she gives him high marks for helping prevent a global economic catastrophe; rolling back Iran’s nuclear program; normalizing relations with Cuba; developing a template (including the Trans-Pacific Partnership) for simultaneously competing and cooperating with China; negotiating the Paris Climate Agreement; limiting the impact of the Ebola epidemic; and gaining the confidence of leaders around the world with steady and often inspirational leadership. That legacy, Rice concludes, predictably, but in my judgment persuasively, “would be sorely challenged and in some cases undone, by what would come next.”

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