

Keep Getting Up: Reflections of a Global Agent for Change

Ann L. Stanford

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It was remarkable to witness the election of Barack Obama as the first black president. It is equally remarkable to learn the story of Ann Stanford, a self-made black woman who rose up the ranks as a career civil servant in the federal government.

In Stanford's autobiography, *Keep Getting Up: Reflections of a Global Agent for Change*, we learn that throughout her life and career she was subjected to not one but two forms of discrimination: gender and race. Over and over, she faced bigotry and prejudice, whether as a girl growing up in the Midwest or as a young professional breaking barriers in the U.S. Foreign Service.

Traveling through the South, for example, Stanford was chided in a retail store by an acquaintance who told her, "we can't touch merchandise, can't try on clothes, hats, shoes, or anything like that. You can get into serious trouble down here for defying this law." It was just the beginning of a long, sad history of astonishingly similar treatment, even when federal laws had been enacted to protect against discrimination.

Stanford has penned the traditional autobiography, tracing her life from childhood through college and into her professional career, most of which she spent working for the federal government. Setting her story apart from standard fare, however, are the many anecdotes relating to subtle and not-so-subtle discriminatory practices. Some of these incidents were the work of sabotage by co-workers; others denied Stanford legitimate opportunities to advance her career. On rare occasions, Stanford writes, she encountered someone in a position of authority willing to evaluate her on merit rather than skin color.

Her stint at the U.S. embassy in Nairobi was typical of what Stanford says she endured. Being ignored by the ambassador and most senior-level officers, she did her job as best she knew how. During a meeting with a Foreign Service official in Washington, however, Stanford was told that "in this business you can't outdo the ambassador and survive ... and you are doing just that ... digging a hole for yourself."

Still, Stanford never backed down. In fact, she often confronted discrimination with a kind of righteous indignation that, if nothing else, brought the issue into the open and led to a confrontation, if not a resolution. Her faith in God gave her courage and helped sustain her, as did the belief that she should be judged based on her qualifications and accomplishments—nothing more.

On occasion, *Keep Getting Up* may seem overly long, detailed, and a bit repetitive. However, Stanford's honest and courageous story is one that deserves to be read.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (February 23, 2012)

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