

*Finally, Lauren Arnold is quite right that the Franciscans established a thriving mission in Mongol China. But it was not permanent (it ended in 1368), and that is why I chose not to mention it.*

#### CONDI'S GRAND STRATEGY

I was disappointed with David Samuels's whitewashed profile of Condoleezza Rice ("Grand Illusions," June *Atlantic*). Any discussion of Rice's ability to advance peace in the Middle East must begin with an analysis of her role in the Iraq War. The job of the national-security adviser, the position Rice held during George W. Bush's first term, is to referee the various foreign-policy arms of the U.S. government, and to balance the advice and interests of the Defense Department, the State Department, and the CIA. This places her at the very heart of the administration's failure to plan for the post-invasion period. Rice either agreed with the philosophy and approach of the neoconservatives or had neither

the competence nor the courage to stand up to them. Either way, her prior failures make her singularly unqualified to lead peacemaking efforts in the region today. It is not clear why Samuels does not deem this dismal track record relevant to his analysis.

*Ely Ratner  
San Francisco, Calif.*

I appreciated David Samuels's thoughtful piece on Condoleezza Rice. However, the panting descriptions of her "long, athletic legs" and "sophisticated clothes" as early as the third paragraph struck me as irrelevant. The emphasis Samuels places on her figure and dress disappointingly reminds the reader that what the press values in a woman, no matter her status, is her looks.

Samuels even calls Rice's "bureaucratic side"—which turns out to be her political savvy and intellectual acumen—"boring." To the contrary. Her junior Sovietologist credentials and her "ability to

master briefing books" are more compelling to me than her "lemon-meringue-colored" suit.

*Arline Welty  
Chicago, Ill.*

#### David Samuels replies:

*I am puzzled by Arline Welty's objections to my brief acknowledgment of Condoleezza Rice's "long, athletic legs" and "sophisticated clothes." It is a fact that Rice has great legs, and she shows them off by wearing skirts that would be at home on a 25-year-old assistant editor at Vogue. The idea that the physical appearance of female public officials is somehow off-limits to journalistic description is a relic of '70s-style equalitarian feminism that would insist on deliberate gender-blindness as the only conceivable road to equality. Rice is making a statement about who she is: a vital, attractive Western woman who works out religiously and is proud of her body and her taste in clothes—aspects of her public self*

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