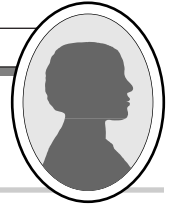


## BIOGRAPHY



## Ron Brown



In 1993, Ron Brown left his position as head of the Democratic National Committee to join Bill Clinton's Cabinet as Commerce Secretary. There he worked especially hard at helping American companies gain access to foreign markets. Brown believed that by generating economic growth in developing countries, American businesses also advanced the causes of peace and democracy.

*As you read, think about the skills Ron Brown brought to public service.*

On April 3, 1996, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown was leading a trade mission to war-torn Bosnia when the plane he was traveling in crashed. Everyone aboard died. Brown's death hit his colleagues at the Commerce Department especially hard. They knew him as a charming, self-confident, and capable man whose leadership would be sorely missed. When President Clinton spoke to them, he praised his friend's boundless energy. "Ron Brown walked and ran and flew through life," he said.

Ron Brown's active life began in Washington, D.C., where he was born in 1941. He grew up in the Harlem section of New York City, where his father managed a hotel. Brown learned to move with ease between the African American culture of his Harlem home and the largely white culture of the elite schools he attended. This ability to thrive in two cultural communities would serve him well in later years.

In 1962, Brown graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont. He then joined the U.S. Army, where he reached the rank of captain. After he earned his law degree in 1970, he went back to Harlem to run a program for needy young people.

Brown moved to Washington, D.C., in 1973. There he worked as an aide to Senator Edward Kennedy and later as a political strategist for Jesse

Jackson's presidential campaign. In the interim, in 1981, he became the first African American partner in one of the capital city's most prestigious law firms.

In 1988, Brown used his skills as a "bridge builder" between blacks and whites to make peace between Jesse Jackson and Michael Dukakis. The two men had battled each other for the Democratic nomination for President. Brown's success helped him win the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee in 1989. In that role he helped unify a divided Democratic Party at its 1992 convention by urging African Americans to support Bill Clinton. Brown is widely credited for helping Clinton win the presidency.

After that triumph, Clinton's appointment of Brown to his Cabinet came as no surprise. Clinton saw Ron Brown for what he was—not just a talented lawyer, but a person who cared about others. Speaking at a memorial service for Brown, Clinton recalled the Commerce Secretary's humanitarian qualities. "Ron Brown," he said, "made his staff memorize a one-sentence mission statement about their job at Commerce. Here it is: 'The mission of the Department of Commerce is to ensure economic opportunity for every American.' That was Ron. He wanted to give other people a chance to live a good life and live the American dream."

### Questions to Think About

1. What skills helped Ron Brown become a success in the world of politics and public service?
2. **Recognizing Ideologies** What beliefs do you think supported Ron Brown's success as a "bridge builder"?