

Strategy Research Project

The Black Community Perspective: Recruiting Blacks into Combat Arms

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2013

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Abstract

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Executive Order 9981 in 1948, eliminated discrimination in the U.S. military, President Truman envisioned armed forces that would extend opportunity to all persons. Today the Army is striving to maintain this vision by recruiting and retaining an organization reflective of the country's diverse population. However, Black officers are underrepresented in the combat arms specifically in the Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery branches. This underrepresentation can be termed occupational segregation. Blacks nonparticipation in these career paths decreases the diversity in these branches and makes it difficult for Blacks to attain appropriate representation among general officers, as more than 59% of the Army's generals are selected from the combat arms. This research study reviews relevant data and discusses reasons for the racial imbalance in Combat Arms branches. It also summarizes a qualitative research study involving interviews of ten African-American leaders in Louisville, Kentucky. The interviews were designed to obtain information about how the Army is viewed in Black communities and on how the Army could address the recruiting and branching challenges that it faces as it seeks to develop a more diverse leadership.

The Black Community Perspective: Recruiting Blacks into Combat Arms

...In particular, Blacks are under-represented among the combat arms. This condition can be termed occupational segregation. The U.S. Army's leadership is concerned about the low number of Black officers serving in the combat arms for two reasons: first, the low number of Blacks in the combat arms reduces the diversity and perhaps the credibility of the U.S. Army's leadership, and second, for Blacks to attain appropriate representation among general officers because seventy-two percent of the U.S. Army's general selected are from the combat arms.

—Emmett E. Burk¹

Purpose of the Study

The Army does not have equitable representation of Blacks in the combat arms branches. The Army must develop a new strategy for its officer corps' accession, branching, and assignment processes for the 21st Century. This Strategy Research Project examines why Black officers enter the military, and why they pursue career branches other than the combat arms of Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery. It focuses exclusively on Black male officers, rather than officers of other minority groups and gender. First, it explores some possible reasons why Blacks are under-represented in the combat arms branches, specifically Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery. Second, it reports the findings of a qualitative research study of the attitudes of a variety of prominent and influential African-Americans in a representative U.S. city. Finally, it suggests new survey approaches for how the Army assesses Blacks' attitudes toward serving in the Army.

Problem Statement

The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC), which was mandated by the 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, called for greater diversity in the military. Upon delivering its findings in March 2011 to President Obama, the Commission

concluded that the senior ranks of the U.S. military lack racial and gender diversity and that this failure to more closely reflect the composition of American society was a strategic problem in need of a solution. The Commission recommended significant changes to policies and practices in accession, branching, promotion and assignments, and they recommended a reexamination of the cultures of the services that favor officers from a narrow subset of branches when promoting to flag rank (e.g., surface warfare and aviation for the Navy, tactical aviation for the Air Force, combat arms for the Army).²

Before proceeding with the body of the paper, one argument in favor of the status quo must be addressed. In the author's experience, a common rebuttal to the assertion that the military is failing to build a diverse group of senior leaders claims that in an all-volunteer force, complete responsibility for joining the military and most of the responsibility for branching rests with the officers themselves. If African-Americans are under-represented in the Officer Corps, and are even less represented in the combat arms, it is by their own choice. Therefore (the argument goes), the Army does not have a problem. This perspective is deeply flawed.

The success or failure of the Army depends on the aggregate impact of the individual choices made by its officers and senior non-commissioned officers. In this case, the key question is not whether the Army is to blame for the choices made by African-American junior officers. Instead, it is whether the collective result of those individual choices has strategic consequences for the Army. If the answer is no, then the status quo is acceptable. If the answer is yes--that is, if the under-representation of African-Americans in combat arms and in the flag officer ranks is a strategic problem--

then the Army must attempt to influence the choices of young African-Americans who are contemplating Army service, or are making a branching decision. So is it a strategic problem? The answer is yes, for two reasons.

First, there is a functional reason for the Army (or any organization) to draw qualified personnel from the largest labor pool possible. If an organization excludes or limits significant segments of population, its workforce is less effective than if it draws from the full spectrum of available of qualified talent. For example, the exclusion of Black players from Major League Baseball prevented many qualified African-American athletes from competing at the highest level of the sport. When baseball finally ended this exclusion, the overall quality of play rose: the talent pool from which teams selected players had expanded suddenly and dramatically. Note that functional challenges may arise as much from the individual choices of potential or actual employees as from active or passive discrimination on the part of the organization. The key point is that an organization that desires to develop the best leaders possible will fill its ranks with the best talent available, regardless of race, gender, etc.

Second, there is an institutional reason for the Army to have senior leaders who more closely reflect the broader composition of American society. The Army is a public institution, dependent on the elected officials of the U.S. Government for its budget, and dependent on the goodwill of the American people for its legitimacy. If the Army fails to reflect the diversity of the nation it protects and represents, then its institutional legitimacy is threatened. In order for the Army to fulfill its Title 10 responsibilities, the public must trust it to identify the right people for key jobs in the organization. That said,

the phrase "reflect the diversity" should not be interpreted to mean that the Army must match in every position the ethnographic and gender diversity of the nation.

Thus, there is both a functional reason and an institutional reason. There is no quota, no magic number that conclusively resolves the question of racial or gender representation. In accounting, there is a useful concept called "materiality." International accounting standards define it as follows: "Information is material if its omission or misstatement could influence the economic decision of users taken on the basis of the financial statements." The Army makes no profit. Its currency is legitimacy. In the context of leadership diversity in the Army, a certain level of under-representation of minorities has a "material impact" on legitimacy when it erodes public trust, when it creates the *perception* of discrimination in minority groups, or when it limits the functional effectiveness of the organization. When the Army released the FY12 Brigadier General Active Component Promotion List in December 2012, no minorities or women were chosen.³ By any measure, that is a "material" shortcoming. In developing its senior leaders, the Army continues to fail to meet the diversity challenge. Many Black junior officers are asking senior military leaders whether the FY 12 promotion list brigadier general represents a new normal. There is an urgent need for change, and it is imperative that the Army develop new approaches to addressing this problem.

The large differences in the proportion of Black officers in the combat arms, combat support (operational support), and combat service support (force sustainment) branches positions suggests occupational segregation, defined as the condition in which distribution of gender and race groups in different jobs widely diverges from their overall representation in an organization.⁴ Ulmer mentioned, "When disproportionately

low represented individuals from a subgroup hold certain types of jobs, the stereotypical belief that there are legitimate and non-discriminatory reasons for them not to be in those jobs develops, and this can lead to the assumption that they are not capable of doing that type of work.”⁵ Occupational segregation develops through the establishment and maintenance of segregation based on individual differences and based on leaders’ discriminatory penchants. A disproportionate representation of people in various groups, occupations, or occupational sub-specialties is enough, in and of itself, to produce status differentials; then members of the minority group are accorded lower status.⁶ Occupational segregation does not necessarily arise through active discrimination by hiring authorities. When fewer individuals from sub-groups hold certain types of jobs, the stereotypical belief is that there are legitimate and non-discriminatory reasons for them not to be in those jobs. Such perceptions lead to the assumption that they are not capable of doing certain privileged type of work.⁷

Occupational segregation is not necessarily an organizational problem if the distribution of minorities in the organization is uncorrelated with the distribution of power--that is, if minorities are well represented in some jobs with strong potential for advancement and influence. However, the underrepresentation of certain sub-groups in certain jobs often creates organizational problems. The imbalance creates a variety of majority/minority or in-group/out-group dynamics that lead to problems for both the dominant group and the minority group.

In the case of the Army, occupational segregation of African-American officers in the Army is highly correlated with power and status. This is a poisonous mix. The Army selects a strong majority of its general officers from the combat arms branches, where

Black officers' representation is very low.⁸ This under-representation creates both a functional and an institutional problem for the Army. First, in filling the ranks of the combat arms, the Army's core capability, the Army is not benefitting from a broader population of qualified talent, and is thereby limiting the access of talented African-American officers to leadership positions in which they would positively influence the Army. Second, because African-Americans are under-represented in the power centers of the organization, the Army is eroding its institutional legitimacy. Even if this condition is not the result of overt or intentional discrimination (and this paper is agnostic on that subject), the result creates a segregated officers corps, and validates the perception of a privileged group of white officers and an inferior group African-American officers.⁹ Members of low status groups are not as highly valued as majority group members are, their contributions are often overlooked.¹⁰ Minority leaders face greater difficulties in establishing the legitimacy of his or her authority when they assume leadership roles generally occupied by the dominant group. This is particularly true when the subordinates are from the majority. In such cases, minorities must continually prove themselves; they are more likely than majority leaders to have their authority questioned by their subordinates.¹¹ This is bad for the officer, and it is bad for the Army.

Whether the fault lies with the capable, young African-American men who choose not to join the Army or who, after joining, choose not to go into combat arms; or with the Army itself, and with the structures and processes that perpetuate this segregation and under-representation, the argument about causes is largely pointless. It is imperative that the Army improve the situation. There is an urgent need for change.

What does success look like? First, the Army must increase the propensity of African-Americans to serve. Specifically, it must increase African-American accessions to the officer corps. Unfortunately, the trends are currently headed the wrong way.

In 2008, the Army Demographics Office released its latest statistics: Black Americans represent 13.6% of Army Soldiers and 13% of the Officer Corps., 22% Combat Arms, 6% of Maneuver combat Arms, Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Only 10.4% of General officers are Blacks. The demographics and charts below indicate that the propensity of Black young people to serve over the years has declined. Among those who do serve, a high percentage serves in the non-combat arms branches.¹² The most worrying trend concerns Black youths' overall propensity to serve in the Army, which declined from 26% in FY85 to 10% in FY09 (See Figure 1).¹³ The percentage of the "Total" Army that is African-American declined by 5+% from FY85 to FY09 (See Figure 2).¹⁴ Note that this has occurred against the background of a shrinking Army, so in absolute numbers the reduction in African-American representation in the Army has

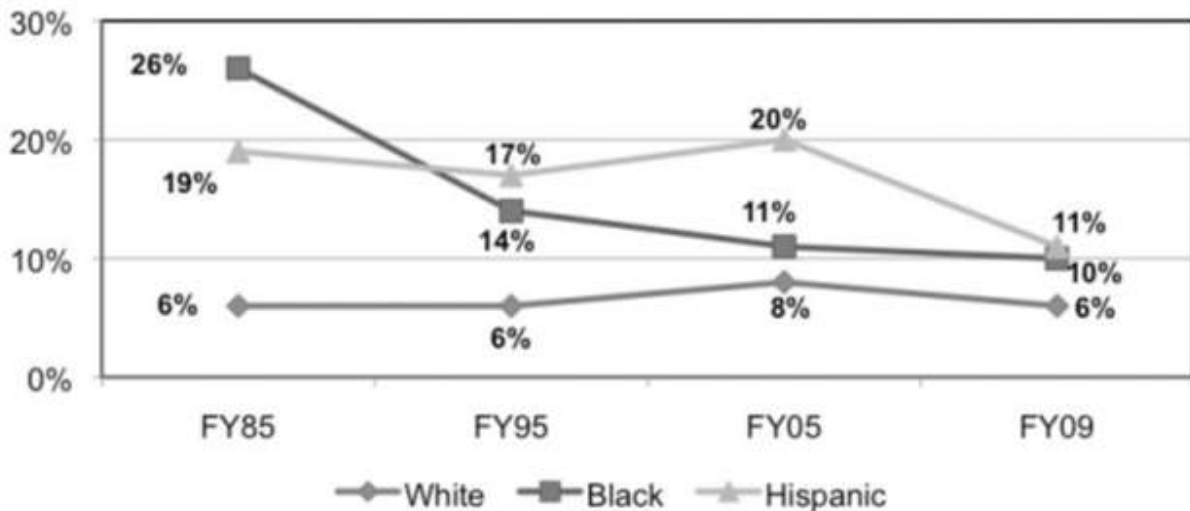


Figure 1. Young People's Propensity to Serve in the Army by Race/Ethnicity¹⁵

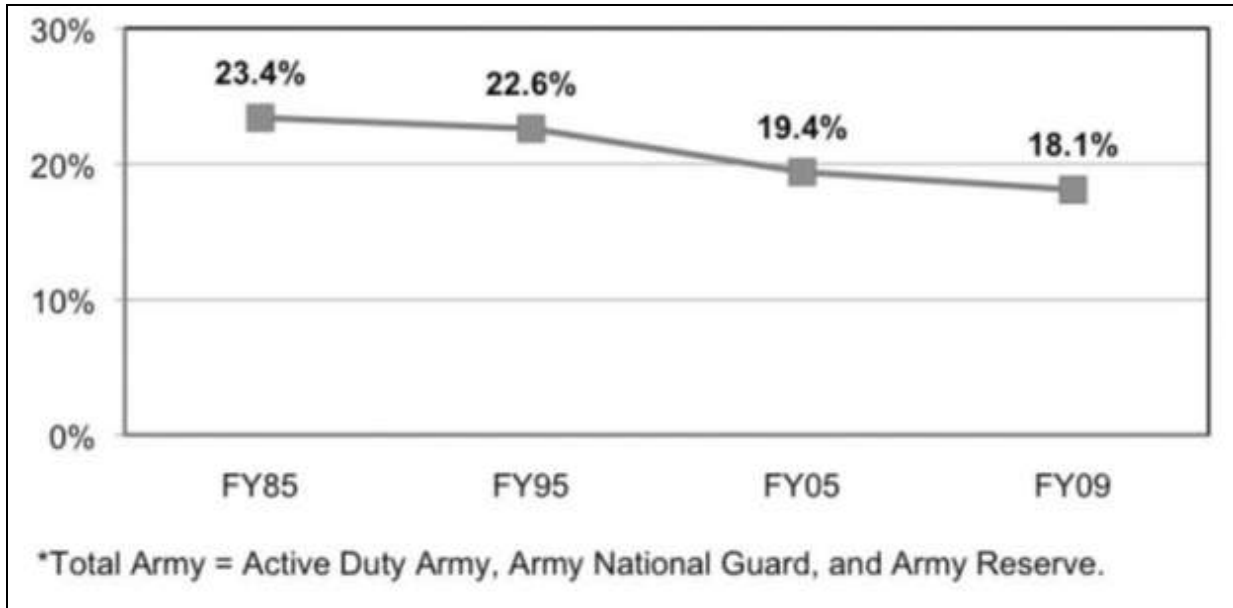


Figure 2. Blacks in the “Total” Army¹⁶

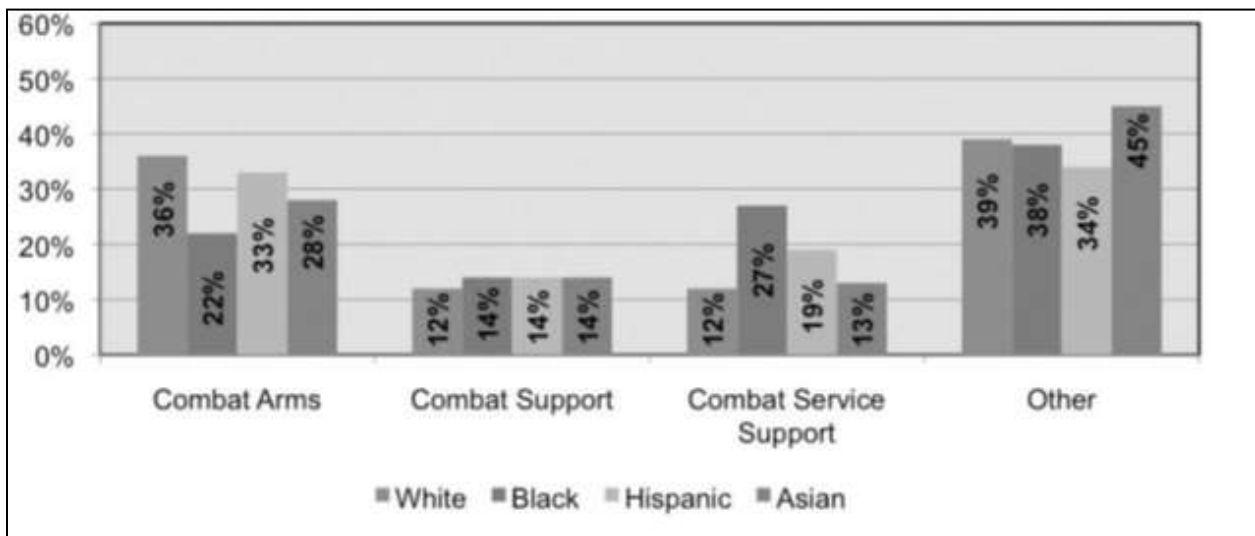


Figure 3. Active-Duty Army by Branch and Race/Ethnicity, FY 09 (Commissioned Officers Only)¹⁷

been significant. Finally, Blacks continue to select combat service support branches over combat arms branches (See Figure 3).¹⁸

To the Army's credit, the organization is aware of these trends, and has made attempts to improve African-American accessions, both for enlisted personnel and for officers. The Army's accessions and branching models are the centers of gravity for the

Army to increase representation of Black officers at senior levels in the combat arms branches. The Army's three primary commissioning sources are U.S. Military Academy (USMA), the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Candidate School (OCS). The ROTC produces the majority of Black officers for the combat arms branches. The Army needs to implement new accessions and branching models that encompass all the sourcing institutions. Army policy grants USMA graduate 80% of the combat arms slots. However, very few Black males attend West Point, so the current branch selection policy give Black officers an in initial career disadvantage. ROTC and OCS have a larger Black population to select from, but ROTC lieutenants have few combat slots. For the Army to successfully recruit more Blacks for the combat arms branches, it must institute a racially equitable accessions and branching model.

The Army has struggled with this problem for a long time. In 1925, the US Army War College conducted a study on the successes and failures of Negro labor from the American Revolutionary War to World War I. This study analyzed each war report and arrived at the following conclusions:¹⁹

- Negro troops were employed for the protection and police of colonial possessions. In France, they were employed to augment the insufficient labor pool, and to ease the financial burden of national defense.
- Negro troops were employed into war for political reasons; they should shoulder the burdens and dangers of the wartime activities of his country. Under efficient white leadership, Negro troops have rendered effective combat service.

- Under Negro officers, they displayed a total ineptitude for modern battle. Their natural racial characteristics, lack of initiative and tendency to become panic-stricken could be overcome only when they had confidence in their leaders.
- They were much more susceptible to panic and their morale was quickly lowered when they come under shellfire or suffer physical hardships.
- Their principal use during the World War was that for which they were best fitted, as service and labor troops. Nevertheless, with selected men under competent leadership they could become useful combat troops but not equal to American White Soldiers.²⁰

This study damaged the opportunities, reputation, and perceptions of Black Soldiers until 1948. President Harry S. Truman then signed Executive Order 9981 requiring “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”²¹ This historic directive led to racial integration in the military and in U.S. society as a whole. It gave Blacks renewed strength and courage to serve their country. Blacks believed that Truman’s directive afforded them equal opportunities and benefits for military service. For Blacks, the playing field seemed to have been leveled.

In 1969, two decades after President Truman’s historic directive, the Secretary of the Defense issued a "Human Goals Charter" to “provide everyone in the military the opportunity to rise to as high a level of responsibility as possible, based only on individual talent and diligence.”²² The Human Goal Charter reflected the Department of Defense’s (DoD's) continuing difficulties with achieving a fully integrated organization. The issue of equal opportunity remains an issue across the DoD today, as the

department's current Equal Opportunity Program indicates. Then Chief of Staff of the Army, General (GEN) George Casey established the Army Diversity Office December 2007. GEN Casey stated that the purpose of this office was to increase awareness and to inform ourselves about how we need to adapt policies and practices so we can sustain awareness and focus on diversity. Clearly, for both the DoD and the Army, achieving appropriate levels of minority integration and representation remains a challenge. The playing field has not yet been leveled.

But this history raises a question? *Why* has the Army failed to achieve greater diversity? When the general societal trends are for greater integration, why are some key trends pointing the wrong way for the Army? As mentioned above, the Army should be credited for its recognition of the problem. However, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the organization has failed in its approach, and that there remains a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the problem. Past research studies done by Army War College students have expanded our understanding. One study showed that African-American officers fare badly in combat arms branches, supporting the prediction that they would suffer in environments in which they are poorly represented (a reinforcing loop of failure). These officers failed because of their lack of mentorship, because they were excluded from the good-old-boy network, and because of cultural misunderstandings.²³ Another study examined the role of ROTC programs historically Black colleges in biasing Black ROTC candidates to non-combat arms branches.²⁴

This study further develops understanding by examining a key (and heretofore ignored) factor in African-American representation in the Army: the African-American community *outside* of the military.

The African-American Community Perspective

Nature of the Study

The African-American community was chosen for the following reasons. First, this community has been silenced on this important issue, and the Army has run out of good ideas on how to recruit Black youths in the Army. Second, the Army should be a microcosm of the society it represents. The low number of Black general officers in the combat arms is inadequate, and in order to help the Army find talented Black youths, it begins with the Black community.

This study seeks to understand the attitudes of the African-American community towards the Army. While the Army has for some time engaged in "market" research on African-American attitudes towards the military, these studies have focused on individuals, ignoring the structural characteristics of communities. Put another way, market research tends to treat every respondent as an equally valid data point. Where *military recruiting* market research privileges one group over another, it focuses on people in the likely age groups for accession, and on parents, who are viewed as key influencers. This may be appropriate for many of the populations from which the military draws its talent. However, this study proposes that the Army's approach is a poor fit to the Black community.

The data in this paper is drawn from interviews conducted with a variety of prominent and influential African-Americans in a representative U.S. city. This exploratory survey may contribute to the generation of a large-sample survey for the Army. The interviews are designed to explore respondents' general perceptions about the Army and to discover what they thought the Army could do to recruit more Blacks in the combat arms, specifically Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery branches. Louisville,

Kentucky was selected as the survey site for several reasons: First, a large African-American population resides there. Second, it is a Southern city, and a disproportionate number of Army officers come from the South. Third, two large military installations (Fort Knox and Fort Campbell) are close to Louisville. Finally, Muhammad Ali, the world's greatest heavyweight boxing champion is from Louisville, Kentucky. Muhammad Ali drew major attention when he decided to avoid draft and protest against the Vietnam War. He was stripped of his world's heavy weight boxing title, but later his title was restored.

Hypothesis

The low number of Black accessions to the military, and the tendency of African-American Army officers to select branches other than combat arms is moderated by the attitudes of African-American community leaders. In addition to family members, local politicians and especially community religious leaders are key influencers, and points of significant leverage in shaping and altering the opinions of Black youth. Through intelligent, enduring, and sincere engagement with these key influencers, the Army can more effectively shape attitudes, and can create allies and strong supporters for Army recruiting efforts.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative instruments (interviews) to assess the views of a small, but theoretically representative cross-section of the African-American community in Louisville, Kentucky. Qualitative studies play an important role in developing understanding in the early stages of research. Creswell's qualitative project describes a research problem that can best be understood by exploring a concept or phenomenon. "Qualitative research is exploratory and researchers use it to explore a topic when the

variables and theory base are unknown.”²⁵ Yin explains that exploratory case studies are condensed case studies in which uncertainty exists about programs operations, goals, and results. Exploratory case studies help identify useful research questions.²⁶

Both open and closed questions are used to examine the respondent's perspective and perceptions on race relations in the Army on why Black youths have shown a lack of interest in military service, and their preference to serve in non-combat arms branches. Interviews were tape-recorded. The recordings were transcribed and interviewees were invited to validate the accuracy of the transcriptions.

The interview sample consists of ten prominent African-Americans (eight male / two female) within Louisville's Black community. None had ever served in the military. The respondents were between the ages 30 – 65; they served as prominent role models. They were teachers, medical professionals, businesspersons, and government workers. Each interview session lasted for approximately one hour; interviews took place in the respondents' homes, in the author's home, and in restaurants. During the interview sessions, the interviewer made no effort to influence the responses, and the interview protocol was structured to avoid framing or biasing responses. Overall, respondents were extremely forthcoming and cooperative. They seemed uncomfortable only when they lacked the depth and knowledge to provide a full response.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumption

It is assumed that the questionnaire provided a reliable means to elicit the desired information. It is assumed that the respondents understood the questions as intended. It is assumed that they responded honestly. It is also assumed the respondents chosen for this study were influential leaders of their community.

Limitation

The primary limitation to this study that all of the participants were African-Americans without any military experience. Their backgrounds, socioeconomic status, age, and values varied. They resided outside of Fort Knox, Kentucky, military installation. This proximity to Fort Knox limited the study's potential generalization to the broader population from which all Army minorities come. Also, it is difficult to determine whether a respondent understood the question properly, although all questions were reviewed for clarity before they were administered. Open-ended questions many times do not attract in depth responses. Finally the interview, an African-American Army officer with 26 years of military service, may himself be biased by his keen awareness of the lack of diversity among higher ranking Combat Arms Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery officers.

Definition of Terms

- Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) – A program that provides college students the skills and leadership training to become officers in the Army, Army Reserves, and National Guard (over 75% of all Army officers commissioned through ROTC). Founded in 1916, Army ROTC has produced more than a half million lieutenants for the Army. It remains the most popular venue for men and women seeking to serve as officers in the Army.²⁷ Fifty-nine percent of all active component Army officers are ROTC graduates.²⁸
- Combat arms – This term refers to units and Soldiers who are trained to destroy enemy forces and provide firepower and destructive capabilities on the battlefield.²⁹

- Combat Support – Refers to units and Soldiers who provide critical combat functions in conjunction with combat arms units and Soldiers to secure victory on the battlefields.³⁰
- Combat Service Support – Refers to essential capabilities, functions, activities, and tasks necessary to sustain all elements of operating forces in theater at all levels of war.³¹
- Company Grade Officer – An Army officer in the rank of second lieutenant, first lieutenant, or captain.³²
- Field Grade Officer – An Army officer in the rank of major, lieutenant colonel, or colonel.³³
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) – Those institutions of postsecondary education were originally founded, or their antecedents were originally founded, for the purpose of providing higher educational opportunities for individuals of the Negro or colored race. They continue to provide postsecondary educational opportunities for Black Americans.³⁴ Most HBCUs host ROTC units.
- Noncombat arms – Operations support and force sustainment branch of the Army; their contributions to stability and support operations sustain all operating forces.³⁵
- Senior Level Officers or Senior Leaders – Refers to officer in the rank of colonel and general officers; they are responsible for the strategic direction of the Army.³⁶

Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in three parts. In the first part, the respondents were asked questions about their perceptions of the Army and the U.S. Armed Forces. In the second part, respondents were asked their opinions on why Black youths are disinclined to join the military. In the third part, respondents were asked how to increase the propensity of Black youths to serve in the Army, and to select combat arms. In all three parts, respondents offered perspectives that suggest a path for the Army to partner with leaders in the Black community to shape attitudes and thereby improve Blacks' accession and branching decisions.

Findings

The respondents' responses are summarized below. In no way did the researcher alter the respondents' responses to reflect his own views.

Summary of Part 1: Attitudes toward the US Army/Military

Overall, the respondents view the military positively. Respondents believe the role of the Army is to win our nation's wars, to ensure that our freedom and welfare are protected, and to provide security for our allies and friends. They view the all-volunteer force as a needed defense of national interests and the Constitution. Respondents recommended that Black youths consider joining the military if they have no plans for college or alternative employment. The military offers an opportunity to receive educational and medical benefits, a chance to travel and see the world, and a way to build trust, character, and leadership skills. Respondents believed military service is an honorable and noble profession. Those who serve or have served are the true standard-bearers for the nation. Respondents felt the individual benefits service members receive are significant. Service members have job security, a lifelong pension after 20 years of

service, guaranteed home loans, priority for federal jobs, and an opportunity to explore different cultures. When asked about American military heroes (of any race) whom they admired, General Colin Powell was named most, followed by the Tuskegee Airmen, and General Norman Schwarzkopf.

When asked how they would advise a young man or young woman who has expressed an interest in joining the military, respondents said that they would recommend speaking with a military recruiter and visiting a military installation to find out what military life is like prior to joining. They also recommended that youth ask relatives and friends who are serving or have served in the military about their experiences. They advised against relying upon the television advertisements or the internet, because these could create false expectations. Respondents expressed a strong view that parents' involvement is essential in the recruitment process to assure its legitimacy.

Summary Part II: Roots of the Problem

A curious paradox emerged in the views of most respondents. As mentioned above, respondents expressed admiration for the military, yet in practical terms, they also view the military as an employer of last resort for Black youths, who now have more opportunities to attend colleges and universities, or to pursue a vocation or trade. In the abstract, military service is viewed positively, but in its particulars, it is not. What is the cause of this contradiction?

Respondents were very open about the reasons for their negative views of military service. Many expressed subtle and lingering resentment about how Blacks were treated in Vietnam, where they believe Black Soldiers assumed a disproportionate share of combat responsibility in a war that most Blacks strongly opposed. Respondents

also were concerned that racial tension similar to that of the Vietnam era remains a risk to the Army, and would be damaging for the service and the nation. (In the author's experience, this view of Vietnam is representative of the views of much of the Black community).

Addressing current issues, respondents cited the continuing discrimination experienced by Black Soldiers, despite their service and their military accomplishments. Respondents also mentioned that many serve for the wrong reasons (joining for employment as opposed to military service), that too many veterans are left homeless, struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or other mental and emotional problems. Respondents viewed the individual costs of service as too great, stating that the benefits of service do not justify the accompanying risk of serious injury or death. Respondents also mentioned the burden on the families of service members: Soldiers' deployments and numerous moves negatively affect the family as a whole.

When asked about the Army in the context of its ongoing problems with developing Black leaders, respondents opined that it is an antiquated institution with "outdated benefits," and that it has failed to adequately describe itself and its mission to the general populace. The Army fails to explain the intricacies and dynamics of Army service. Respondents expressed some understanding of the missions filled by the Army ("the world's 911 response force" and "baby sitter"), but they did not connect those missions to crucial national interests.

Respondents expressed disappointment about the lack of Blacks in senior leadership positions in the Army. Reflecting the aforementioned "social imperative" of diversity, respondents believed that the Army should be a microcosm of American

society. Some acknowledged that the Army has made great strides and progress for Blacks, but that these changes are insufficient. Respondents also echoed the “functional imperative” of diversity—the Army, the nation, and the Black community will benefit when the Army embraces and champions diversity. An organization that strives for diversity will outperform its competitors in generating new ideas and innovations. Furthermore, the under-representation of Blacks hurts the Army; it discourages Blacks from joining, reducing the propensity to serve in a qualified pool of talent.

With respect to Black representation in the combat arms branches of the Army, respondents believed that Black officers prefer non-combat arms branches because they see greater opportunities for success there. Black Army officers must overcome the prejudiced view (whether conscious or not) that Black are less capable of success in combat arms. The predominance of White officers in the combat arms creates the perception that non-Whites will be at a disadvantage. Underlying this view is skepticism about the ability and/or inclination of White officers to mentor and develop young Black officers. Respondents also hypothesized that Black officers prefer non-combat arms branches because they create better opportunities for jobs in civilian sector. Therefore (according to this view), it does not matter if officers anticipate remaining with the Army throughout their careers, or leaving the service as junior officers, Black officers are better off in non-combat arms branches.

Returning to the challenge of mentorship in the Army, though respondents had expressed skepticism about White officers mentoring Black officers in the combat arms, most respondents also believed that White officers can serve as good mentors to Black officers. When asked about the role of race in the mentorship relationship (whether

between an ROTC cadet and instructor, or a junior and senior officer) should have no role (or a limited role). Indeed, the mentoring experience should include learning about and understanding cultural differences and norms. In the context of the commissioning role of historically Black colleges and universities, respondents believed that these commissioning sources should also embrace greater diversity, an essential characteristic of all ROTC programs (and all commissioning sources). Respondents generally believed that the Army is a meritocracy. Yet—expressing another contradiction—they also agreed that networks and relationships are crucial for success; it is not “what you know, but whom you know.” Opportunities exist, but a person’s ability to seize those opportunities is influenced by his or her cultural understanding and connection to others in the organization. A meritocracy depends on a perception of fairness. While this perception may not be undermined by the inevitable instances of favoritism, if members of the organization see a correlation between favoritism and race, then claims of merit-based rewards and fairness will not be credible. Thus, respondents believed that diversity is the key ingredient to produce fairness—both perceived and actual—in an organization.

Part III: How to Fix the Problem

When asked how to address the problem of the under-representation of Blacks in Army leadership, and about the declining propensity to serve amongst Black youth, respondents offered numerous suggestions. Many of them focused on providing successful role models who would share their stories and let youth know that serving in the military is a proud and honorable profession, one in which African-Americans can and must have a central role. In this vein, some recommended a strategic

communication approach could target youth centers, churches, and game rooms within Black communities. Respondents also suggested the following:

- an active, on-the-ground campaign could provide education and literature
- a program highlighting successful Black combat arms role models—perhaps through visits to communities, schools, and churches
- a program linking Black youth with successful role models from the Army
- a weekend or monthly program to bring Black youths to military installations for exposure to military life, and to dispel negative perceptions about Blacks serving in the military

One respondent suggested that African-American community leaders initiate a meet-and-greet with Army leadership to address Blacks' concerns and issues and to find ways to target Black youths for military service.

Respondents also recommended that senior military leaders invite Black community leaders to their military installations to let them know why the Army considers it important to attract Black youths into the combat arms branches.

What is Next?

The Military Commission did excellent work in identifying problems in leader development. However, its recommendations for improving leadership diversity are somewhat vague:

- Establish the foundation for effective diversity leadership with a definition of diversity that is congruent with DoD's core values and vision of its future.
- Develop future leaders who represent the nation's diversity and who are able to lead a diverse workforce to maximize mission effectiveness.

- Implement policies and practices that will make leaders accountable for instilling diversity leadership as a core competency of the Armed Forces.
- Increase the pool of eligible candidates for promotion to higher ranks.
- Improve outreach and recruiting strategies.
- Eliminate barriers to career advancements.³⁷

This amounts to what a colleague of the author calls “be handsome advice.” It is compelling, but difficult to operationalize. This difficulty is compounded by the clear picture that emerges from the interviews conducted for this project: the Army’s current approach to outreach with the African-American community is not going to achieve the desired results.

The Army has two challenges: first, it must stop the decline in Black youths’ propensity to serve; second, it must increase the number of Black officers selecting combat arms branches. This paper proposes six recommendations for achieving these goals. The first two recommendations concern the Black community, which can be a powerful ally in achieving these goals. The third addresses mentorship models in the Army. The fourth suggests a balancing tool for commissioning sources. The fifth recommends specific metrics for leaders that hold them accountable for developing minority officers. These five initiatives will help the Army achieve the results desired by Military Leadership Diversity Commission, and will be a leap forward in altering the perceptions Blacks have about the Army in general, and about combat arms branches in particular.³⁸

A theme across interview subjects was the need for the Army to leverage key influencers in the Black community. Specifically, the Army should build partnerships with two influential entities: Black Churches, and Black fraternities.

The Army must reach out to the Black Churches. Black churches are the “Centers of Gravity” of many Black communities. These churches continue to play a pivotal role in shaping and changing society. They improve urban communities and provide safe havens for Black children. They approach the terrible problems of gang violence in the same way they faced slavery: with constant hope and amazing faith. They have been the torch-bearer of the civil rights movement since its beginning; they played a prominent role in establishing a moral consensus for the civil rights of Blacks in America. Many individual and collective efforts contributed to the freedoms African Americans enjoy, but few institutions provided the united voice echoed throughout the Black Church.³⁹

Benjamin Mays, former President of the NAACP, claims “the great importance attached to the political maneuvering at a National Baptist Convention...can be explained in part by the fact the Negro is largely cut off from leadership in the body politic. The local churches, associations, conventions and conferences become the Negro’s Democratic and Republican conventions, his Legislature, his Senate and House of Representatives.”⁴⁰ If the Army wants to erase the perception amongst Black youths that the military is an employer of last resort, the Black churches are in a position to help. The Army Recruiting Command should reach out to Black churches within their recruiting locales to begin a dialogue and partnership based on awareness, benefits, and positive Black role models who have served with distinction in combat arms.

Second, the Army must reach out to Black fraternities, a key influencer on college campuses. The Army ROTC Program does a fantastic job in reaching out to athletes on college campuses as potential recruits for the Army ROTC Program. Many respondents suggested that the Army explore collaborating with the nine historically Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) that make-up the National Pan-Hellenic Council. Collectively, these organizations its members are referred to as the “Divine Nine.” Wherever they are found, Black fraternities play an important role in student life, but their influence persists well beyond graduation. They promote camaraderie and academic excellence, they organize and volunteer for community service. They enhance community awareness and action through educational, economic, and cultural service activities. The Army ROTC Program should establish partnerships programs with the Black Divine Nine, and with member sororities and fraternities on college campuses to identify potential candidates for the ROTC program. The Army Recruiting Command should establish a partnership program with the National Pan-Hellenic Council. These organizations provide youth mentorship programs, academic enrichment programs, and sports programs in all 50 states and overseas.⁴¹ This partnership will provide the Army with the talent pool it is looking for as potential recruits—the best and brightest of the Black community. Many Black Army senior military leaders are members of Black fraternities and sororities.

A third recommendation emerged from the interviews: White officers should be assigned to Historical Black Colleges/Universities. In this respect, the Black community must also take responsibility, in partnership with the Army, to break down cultural barriers and expose the bankruptcy of the idea that White officers cannot adequately

mentor Black subordinates, which is itself a model that perpetuates of racism. Human Resources Command (HRC) should assign both White and Black combat arms officers to Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Currently, HBCUs have mostly Black non-combat arms officers as Professors of Military Science (PMS). Past studies have shown cadets tend to select non-combat arms branches based on their PMS' branch. The survey group believes this paradigm shift to combat arms officers and PMS and ROTC staff, who serve as mentors, will incline cadet to select a combat arms branch. In addition, these assignments will begin to break down cultural barriers and perceptions that White officers cannot mentor Black cadets.

Fourth, the Army must address the notion (expressed by the respondents) that Blacks prefer non-combat arms branches because those skill sets easily transfer into the civilian sector market. One approach is a new accessions and branching model. that conjoins the three sourcing institutions—West Point, ROTC, and OCS—into one accessions and branching model managed by Human Resources Command. This would balance access to initial assignments in the combat arms branches—in other words, any commissioning source would have to branch officers roughly in line with the overall force structure. Currently, the Army's Cadet Command is using a pilot program that requires male ROTC cadets to list two combat specialties among their top four preferences. Under this pilot program, the percentage of minorities selecting infantry, field artillery and armor has increased 5 percent.⁴²

Fifth, and in accordance with the MLDC's guidance, the Army must develop and implement specific metrics to evaluate officers according to their development of minority officers, including a system of accountability with legislative oversight of

promotion process.⁴³ The Army should implement a policy that requires active duty battalion and brigade commanders to report quarterly to their senior raters the status of their minority officers in key development positions and Officer Evaluation Report profile ratings. Note that this approach is not the same as quotas. It focuses organizational attention on creating opportunities for qualified personnel, not on achieving arbitrary numerical targets. Although the commanders' intentions are commendable, they are insufficient for a lasting solution. The Army must manage diversity, and this requires more than simply supplementing an old system with new initiatives. It requires changing the system and modifying the core culture, which includes senior leaders' oversight of the professional development processes. This measure of performance will promote diversity and fairness within the ranks.

The Army cannot solve this problem on its own. Senior leaders must also aggressively pursue diversity among the most senior ranks. Former Secretary of the Army Clifford L. Alexander increased diversity in the general officer ranks. During Secretary Alexander's tenure from 1977 through 1981, he rejected a list of officers submitted for promotion to general because it failed to include one Black candidate, but Secretary Alexander knew many Black colonels had served with distinction. He told the promotion board to go back and review the records of eligible Black colonels. Following this review, Black candidates were added to the general officer promotion list; Colin Powell was among those added. He later earned four stars and served as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During Alexander's tenure, the number of Black generals increased from 8 to 31. This kind of leadership is required to assure that the ranks of

Army senior officers reflect diversity that meets the functional and social requirements of the institution.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The Army has the finest officer training programs in the world. However, it can make improvements to the current system by setting a single Army-wide standard for accessions, branching, and assigning all young officers—most by assuring that all young officers have an equal opportunity for leaping onto the most promising career tracks.

However, if the Army fails to recruit and retain a diverse officer corps that reflects the nation it serves, it assumes functional and social risks that could affect readiness and undermine the professional fighting force. A failure to meet the expectations of external stakeholders (the Congress and—more important—the American People) puts the Army at risk of losing its relative independence in managing the force and developing leaders. Worse yet, the Army may lose the trust of the nation. While this paper has focused on measures to improve the development of Black leaders, the Army must change its policies and guidance to ensure that all groups are properly represented and integrated in its combat arms branches, and that the Army's leadership reflects the wealth of diversity in the nation.

General Colin Powell believes that the freedoms we enjoy today are only possible because of the sacrifices of the Soldiers who have served this great nation in war at various times for over 300 years.⁴⁵ Since 1641, there has never been a time in this country when African-Americans were unwilling to serve and to sacrifice for this nation. Before and during the Revolutionary War, and through every war to the present, Black men and women have served and died for this country. All the current generation

of Black officers wants is an equal opportunity to serve in all areas of the Army, and to lead this great Army at its most senior levels. It is in the best traditions of the Army that the service be an institutional leader in providing such opportunities.

Endnotes

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