Meritocracy or Hypocrisy: The Legacy of Institutionalized Racism in Combat-Arms

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The low number of senior African Americans commanding in combat arms units at the BN level and above is an issue the Army has acknowledged for decades. The Army has sought to address it in recent history through various organizations and task forces. Despite the recent efforts, the more than one hundred years of official research, and the implementation of various councils and commissions, the number of African American senior leaders serving in combat arms command positions remains a strategic issue and a challenge for the Army in the twenty-first century.
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Abstract

The low number of senior African Americans commanding in combat arms units at the BN level and above is an issue the Army has acknowledged for decades. The Army has sought to address it in recent history through various organizations and task forces. Despite the recent efforts, the more than one hundred years of official research, and the implementation of various councils and commissions, the number of African American senior leaders serving in combat arms command positions remains a strategic issue and a challenge for the Army in the twenty-first century.
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We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Department of Defense and its subordinate Departments of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Marine Corps, have a long history in the institutionalization of racist policies, practices, and procedures that have had enduring adverse effects on African Americans serving in the United States Armed Forces.¹ The focus of this Strategy Research Project (SRP) will be on the U.S. Army, and African Americans in the specific combat arms branches of the Infantry, Armor, and Special Forces. When addressing combat arms throughout the remainder of this paper, the author is referring specifically to these three branches. This SRP will address the hypocrisy of meritocracy in the Army, and the implicit biases of senior military leadership that thwart the efforts of minority Officers from entering the ranks of command in the Army’s Battalions (BN), Brigades (BDE), Divisions (DIV), Corps and above.

To understand the exclamatory charges of this introduction and to contextualize their usage throughout this paper, the definitions of discrimination, racism, and institutional racism, must be defined and established. Merriam-Webster defines discrimination as a prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment made categorically rather than individually.² In her book, "Institutional Racism," Shirley Better

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defines racism as "an individual act or an institutional practice that perpetuates inequality, and has the power to exploit another person based on racial membership."³ Better defines institutional racism as "those patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of nonwhite racial/ethnic groups."⁴ In Figure 1, Better provides a model that depicts the interwovenness of society and its institutions that develop policies, practices, and procedures that form the foundation of institutional racism.

![Figure 1. Institutional Racism](image)

It is in the context of the above definitions that data from the Army’s past is collected and examined, to shed light on the problems the Army struggles with in the 21ˢᵗ Century, regarding diversity in combat arms and upward mobility into senior leadership positions in the DIVs, Corps, and above. It is from the archives of the United States Army War College (USAWC) that this history will be extracted and examined to


⁴ Better, p. 22.

⁵ Better, p. 13.
reveal institutional policies, practices, and procedures that were used over time, to perpetuate inequalities, disadvantage, and exploit African Americans. The effects of these past policies continue to have an impact on diversity in the Army.

Social and Functional Imperatives

Based upon the Army’s Mission and Vision for the future, the Army has a social imperative to reflect the society it serves, as well as a functional imperative to have equity in the representation of ideas and life experiences amongst its senior leaders and decision-makers.\(^6\) Over the past fifty years, many Officers and Civilians attending Senior Service Colleges (SSC) and Fellowships at various institutions across the Department of Defense (DOD) have written on the subject of diversity, discrimination, and equality for African American Officers, and their limited access into the senior levels of leadership in the Armed Forces. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) has been conducting research and studies on diversity, discrimination, and equal opportunity in the armed forces since 1914.\(^7\) U.S. members of Congress and committees have conducted investigations into this problem as well. U.S. Representative Elijah Cummings stated that “the Army should be able to provide tangible results as a true measure of the leadership’s commitment to institutionalizing diversity.”\(^8\)

Close examination of the history of the Army’s institutional racism and discriminatory policies, along with the current status of African American Officers

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\(^7\) Congressional Research Service Homepage, [http://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/about/history.html](http://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/about/history.html).

commanding combat arms units, will provide a connection to the legacy of prejudice, discrimination, and implicit bias against African American Officers in combat arms. According to Better, to make this connection, one will have to admit and “accept that racism is purposely in place within American institutions to preserve white privilege.”9 She further states that this admission would mean that meritocracy is not afforded to those who are discriminated against.10

To understand the significant effects of the legacy of institutional racism, discrimination, and implicit bias, a historical mindedness approach of study must be applied to grasp their lasting effects on African Americans serving in combat arms. Peter N. Sterns emphasizes the importance of history declaring, “history must serve, however imperfectly, as our laboratory, and data from the past must serve as our most vital evidence in the unavoidable quest to figure out why our complex species behaves as it does in societal settings.”11 In his book on former USAWC commandant, Major General (MG) Edward Almond, U. S. Army Heritage and Education Center's (USAHEC) research historian, Michael E. Lynch, argues the same for historical mindedness as it relates to understanding the totality of an individual or a society.12 Eliot Cohen described

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the historical mindedness approach as serving a unique purpose in “understanding how societies behave and conduct themselves in their current environments.”

Historical Racist Policies and Practices (1920-1970s)

After World War I, the Army was faced with a new dilemma. How to employ the Negro in future wars? Under the direction of Commandant MG Hanson E. Ely, the USAWC took on the responsibility to help the War Department solve this problem. In 1925, the USAWC commissioned a study on the Employment of Negro Man Power in War. The historical data collected from the studies conducted at the USAWC will provide relevant context on the discriminatory policies and procedures that shaped Army senior leadership through numerous wars and the subsequent generations of Army Officers to come. It is of utmost importance to read the exact words of MG Ely to fathom the profound impact he would have on shaping the Army’s policy and future leaders on how “negroes” were to be utilized for generations to come. The words, thoughts, and ideologies from MG Ely did not begin on his watch, nor did they dissipate upon his death. They precede his time by centuries of thought that have continuously been passed down from one generation to the next without a broken succession. In the introduction of this study on Negro Man Power, MG Ely wrote to the Army Chief of Staff:

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15 Major General H. E. Ely, Commandant USAWC, “Memorandum for the Chief of Staff: Employment of Negro Man Power in War,” AWC 127-25, USAHEC, November 10, 1925, https://nam03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fdrlibrary.org%2Fdocuments%2F356632%2F390886%2Ftusk_doc_a.pdf%2F4693156a-8844-4361-ae17-03407e7a3dee&data=01%7C01%7Cokera.anyabwile%40armywarcollege.edu%7C73e92e94a0974021d6ca08d799ea8198%7C13757c66f849f4f0c98e0265f2dd0d6%7C0&sdata=6L0BTKq3v9QM4rFLlsKmdt8nIaL6yzGzP8JTeA77cJE%3D&reserved=0, p. 2.
I am enclosing a study on the Employment of Negro Man Power in War, made by a committee of the Army War College, composed of Colonel Bishop, Major Drain, and Major Somervell. It is based on research by previous classes, by the faculty, as well as on War Department experiences during the World War. It is believed to be of such value in lieu of further study by the General Staff, as to furnish a basis for the employment of the negro in the next war. I recommend, unless and until a more complete study be made on the subject by the General Staff, that it be accepted as the War Department policy in handling this problem.\textsuperscript{16}

Why is this statement important? It is essential because the USAWC, under the direction of MG Ely, established and shaped future Army policy and how to move forward with this “problem.” It is important because he is not only recommending this to the Army Chief of Staff for the Army’s benefit, but he was also recommending that whatever policies come forth from the research at the USAWC, should be accepted as War Department policy as well. In addressing this "negro" problem, MG Ely continued,

\textit{It is recommended that this study be taken as the basis of the policy of the War Department for the use of negro manpower and that the plan proposed herein be used as a guide in the revision of the War Department General Mobilization Plan. The policies and plan for the use of negro manpower proposed in this study are the culmination of several years of study by the faculty and student body of the Army War College.}\textsuperscript{17}

It must be clear who is conducting this research. These opinions were not solely those of MG Ely. They were opinions that were shared by his seniors, his peers, his faculty, and the body of students who rotated through the USAWC. Some of these students and faculty members would move forward in their careers to become senior military leaders, shaping policies on how African Americans should be used in combat arms. MG Ely believed and propagated that the African American was not physically or


\textsuperscript{17} Ely, “Employment of Negro Man Power in War,” p. 7.
mentally capable of being an Officer or leader in the Army. He says of the negro’s capacity to lead,

The psychology of the negro, based on heredity derived from mediocre African ancestors, cultivated by several generations of slavery, followed by about three generations of evolution from slavery in the anomalous state of legal without actual equality with the white, is one from which we cannot expect to draw leadership material.\(^{18}\)

In this quote, MG Ely attempted to attribute his assessment of the African American solely based upon heritage and race. However, what he did unwittingly, was to recognize and admit the impact that generations of slavery, violent oppression and denial of any human rights could have on the psyche and mental state of human beings.\(^{19}\) This is true of the effects of institutionalized racism that is allowed to permeate inside any organization or society unfettered over prolonged periods.\(^{20}\) Centuries and generations of accepted racism will have a lasting effect on any population, both the oppressed and the oppressors.\(^{21}\)

The African Americans’ faculty and fidelity to serve in the military, and their motives for wanting to fight for their freedoms were always in question. On this issue, MG Ely believed,

Their (negroes) principle idea was not that they were in the service to fight for their country, but that they were there for the advancement of their racial interests. In general the Negro officer was still a Negro, with all the


\(^{19}\) Better, p. 16.

\(^{20}\) Better, p. 58.

\(^{21}\) Lynch, p. 63. – War Department, Office of the Chief of Staff, memorandum to Commanding General, Services of Supply, “Subject: Professional Qualities of Officers Assigned to Negro Units,” August 10, 1942, 92nd Infantry Division Special File, 1942-1944, Box 13695B, Record Group (hereafter RG) 407 (Records of the Adjutant General’s Office 1917-), NARA.
faults and weaknesses of character inherent in the Negro race, exaggerated by the fact that he wore an officer’s uniform.\textsuperscript{22}

With all certainty and justification, it was a fact that African Americans were fighting for their “racial interests” to be accepted and treated as free human beings endowed with certain inalienable rights. This did not contradict their desire to fight for their country, but profoundly enhanced that desire. MG Ely and his contemporaries could not accept the fact of African Americans being Officers and wearing the uniform. According to his own words, this belief was shared by all Officers, subordinates, peers, and superiors alike.

MG Ely admitted that, “All officers, without exception, agree that the Negro lacks initiative, displays little or no leadership, and cannot accept responsibility.”\textsuperscript{23} The USAWC was establishing policies on how the Army should use African Americans in the military. These policies were to shape the future, starting from the highest levels of Professional Military Education (PME). It was a military reinforcement of how society desired to deal with its deplorables. He continued,

An opinion held in common by practically all officers is that the negro is a rank coward in the dark. His fear of the unknown and unseen will prevent him from ever operating as an individual scout with success. His lack of veracity causes unsatisfactory reports to be rendered, particularly on duty.\textsuperscript{24}

Here MG Ely is verifying that he is not alone in this assessment. This was something that he professed all Officers believed. He went even further to claim that his assessment of the African American and his lack of ability to lead was more than a

\textsuperscript{22} Ely, “Employment of Negro Man Power in War,” p. 31.


theory. MG Ely stated that this perception was so universally upheld that it should be recognized as a fact.

One of the peculiarities of the negro as a soldier is that he has no confidence in his negro leaders, nor will he follow a negro officer into battle, no matter how good the officer may be, with the same confidence and lack of fear that he will follow a white man. This last trait has been so universally reported by all commanders that it cannot be considered as a theory – the negroes themselves recognize it as a fact.\(^\text{25}\)

In fervent denial of the ability for African Americans to lead in combat, MG Ely asserted that the only way that African Americans could be led successfully was for them to be led by white Officers.\(^\text{26}\) Not just any type of white Officer, but a specific type that had a particular type of history of dealing with African Americans. MG Ely emphasized that, “The majority of negroes left at home will be in the southern states where they will be needed for labor and where they can best be handled by competent whites.”\(^\text{27}\)

What did MG Ely mean by “competent whites?” Did he mean someone who had hatred and dislike for African Americans because of their color? Did he mean someone who believed in and upheld southern Jim Crow Laws, and was very familiar with how African Americans were harshly treated in the South? Again, these are policy recommendations that MG Ely is making on who could best control the “problem.” Whatever MG Ely meant when he said, “competent whites,” seventeen years later, MG Edward M. Almond, was to lead the 92nd Infantry Division, an all African American Infantry Division. Michael Lynch describes MG Almond as a man who harbored bigoted

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\(^{26}\) Ely, “Employment of Negro Man Power in War,” p. 2  
attitudes against African Americans and was shaped by his childhood in a society of segregation and the enforcement of Jim Crow Laws.\textsuperscript{28} Lynch points out in his book, that the Army Chief of Staff, General (GEN) George C. Marshall personally selected MG Almond because he felt that the all African American division needed a white Officer who had the “ability to handle negroes.”\textsuperscript{29} Lynch goes further into detail, explaining what GEN Marshall meant when he was looking for specific types of leaders to lead African American units. Lynch says of GEN Marshall, “Marshall and Army’s senior leaders looked for the best leaders possible for black troops, but they believed those leaders came from the descendants of an oppressive culture; only the oppressors could understand the oppressed.”\textsuperscript{30} This quote is taken from an official memorandum from GEN Marshall to MG Almond with the subject, “Professional Qualities of Officers Assigned to Negro Units.”\textsuperscript{31} What is key in this sentence, is the “but.” MG Almond was not selected solely because of his military leadership. It was also because of his staunch racist beliefs, policies, and actions towards negroes that made him the right man for the job.

When MG Ely was prescribing policy on how to employ African Americans in 1925, he left no doubt of what was required and who was required to keep African Americans in their place (only an oppressor can understand the oppressed). MG Almond’s selection to become the commander of the 92\textsuperscript{nd} IN DIV provides validation to

\textsuperscript{28} Lynch, p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{29} Lynch, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{30} Lynch, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{31} Lynch, p. 63.
the existence of institutional racist policies that MG Ely and other senior Army leaders were establishing and continuing over decades. MG Ely made those statements in 1925. MG Almond commanded the 92nd ID in 1942 and was put in position by GEN George C. Marshall. MG Almond would continue to rise in command and ironically become the USAWC commandant in 1952. However ironic, it was not by chance that these men, with their staunch racist beliefs, were chosen to lead the highest institution of PME, the USAWC, and shape policy for future generations.

Regarding African American service in the combat arms branches, MG Ely stated, “The negro does not desire combat duty under conditions of present day warfare. That if when drafted into service he was given a choice of assignment to a combat organization or to a Labor Battalion, the majority would chose the less dangerous service.”32 This same explanation is heard in the 21st Century when asked why there are not more African American Officers in the combat arms branches. Some senior military leaders commonly socialize the notion that it is natural for most African American males to choose to go into support or sustainment branches rather than serve in combat arms. These are eerily similar statements that MG Ely made regarding the best place for minorities to serve.33 At the same time, these senior leaders refuse to acknowledge the effects of an institutionalized system that has historically and deliberately denied minorities entry into the combat arms branches, as captured above.

This is mendacity that has been perpetuated by the undercurrent of a legacy of institutionalized racism that did not want to see people of color serving in combat units

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and reaching high levels of leadership. MG Ely emphasized this point when he stated that, “As non-combatants in service and labor units and as drivers of animal and motor transports they (negroes) did good service.\(^{34}\) As combat troops under modern war conditions they never rose to the standard of white units even when well led by white officers.”\(^{35}\) Here it is encouraged and recommended that African Americans are better utilized as non-combatants in support and service type units. These are policy recommendations that MG Ely is providing to the War Department on the best way to employ African Americans in the future. Today, it is within these branches of support, where one finds the majority of African Americans accessing and commissioning. One must understand that it was Army policy over generations that shaped the trajectory of African Americans entering the service branches, diminishing their opportunities to succeed in the combat arms branches.

If it can be shown that the Negro is given an equal opportunity with the white man to qualify for commissioned grades, and that only his own lack of qualifications prevent his commission in the higher grades or in combat units, then social and political demands of the administration can be resisted.\(^{36}\)

In the above quote, MG Ely is codifying how to legally discriminate and eliminate African Americans from the combat arms branches and entry into the senior levels of leadership in the Army. He was inferring that if it could be proven, based upon qualification standards and evaluations of the African American’s performance in combat arms, the Army could legitimately resist presidential and governmental demands for equality, and


keep the African American in his place without repercussion. MG Ely validates this code by tying “unsatisfactory reports” to the negro’s nature of not being fit to lead.37

The Butler Report (1971)

While the thought of fabricating inaccurate reports or derogative ratings on African Americans may seem like a stretch of the imagination, fifty years after MG Ely’s ideation of “unsatisfactory reports,” the Department of the Army (DA) released a report entitled The Butler Report in 1975.38 The Butler Report “is a meticulously researched statistical analysis of three separate cohorts of Officer efficiency reports that tracked Officers’ ratings and promotions from 1956 to 1971.”39 It was researched and composed by COL Douthard D.R. Butler. Its analytical data provided proof of the “natural endemic racial culture that existed in the U.S. Army from the Civil War through Vietnam,” overlapping the tenures of both MG Ely and MG Almond.40 Although the DA attempted to keep this report hidden, it was forced to be revealed based upon the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).41 In Isaac Hampton’s book, The Black Officer Corps, Hampton provides two complete chapters on the significance and scale of Butler’s research, and the effects it had on the entire DOD. Butler’s research proved that “black Officers were the victims of conscious and institutionalized (systemic) racism, and that racism had

39 Hampton, p. 69.
40 Hampton, p. 70.
41 Hampton, p. 69.
found its way into the promotion structure of the armed forces.”\textsuperscript{42} These findings proved the “startling disparities in the ratings given to white and black officers, which had a detrimental impact on black officer’s promotions, career enhancing assignments, accessions into the Regular Army, selections for advanced military schooling, and ultimately, underrepresentation in the leadership of the Army officer’s corps.”\textsuperscript{43} The Butler Report authenticated what African American Officers knew to be true, but could not prove, was taking place behind the closed doors of opportunity. It validated the realization that “nearly 200 years of racist social custom and American military tradition, was the foundation, which dictated that people of color were still not seen as racial equals to many White Americans.”\textsuperscript{44}

Imagine if the DODs Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI), formerly the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (ODMEO), did what COL Butler did on the DOD scale? COL Douthard Butler, on his own, extracted empirical data from a snap-shot of time of fifteen years and came to an undeniable conclusion of what was being done against the progress and upward mobility of minorities, that forced changes in the way Officer evaluations were handled. ODEI is responsible for promoting diversity in the workplace. Although the USAWC maintains decades of SRPs and research efforts by individuals that attest to the problems of diversity and racial discrimination against minorities in combat arms, the above official organizations have yet to publicly produce any verifiable data on the level of what COL Douthard Butler

\textsuperscript{42} Hampton, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{43} Hampton, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{44} Hampton, p. 74.
produced back in 1972. The impact is that these challenges continue to get kicked down the road for the next new diversity organization to look into it.

Equal Justice (Past and Present)

MG Ely and MG Almond are not alone in how they contributed to the demise of many African American Officers. There are numerous historical accounts of Army leaders, both civilian and military such as Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, whom both supported segregation and held racist views. What is most important in studying this history is understanding the lasting effects institutionalized racism and discriminatory policies have had on the limitations of African Americans in combat arms for generations. There are some who will argue for the greatness of both MG Ely and MG Almond and what they contributed to the Army. The great things that Ely and Almond did on behalf of the Army are uncontested, however, their racist policies of prejudice and discrimination thwarted the careers of generations of African Americans who were striving to serve their country in good faith. If both of their accomplishments were placed on a scale of justice, the wrongs they committed against African Americans for generations far outweigh any good. However, both are honored legends along the halls of the USAWC and USAHEC, with their pictures hanging proudly as former commandants.

The blatant hypocrisy in all of this, is that in late 2019, a senior General Officer (African American), was reduced in rank to Major General, forced to retire, had his

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45 Lynch, p. xiii.

USAWC academic record expunged, his Master’s degree revoked, and his name removed from the class plaque his name was etched in, due to being found guilty of plagiarism on his personal SRP, while a student at the USAWC. After thirty-nine years of faithful service and harming no one other than himself, and his honor, none of his good works were spoken of in consideration. It is true that what was done, violated the Army Values, and there should be consequences. However, how does this compare to what MG Ely and MG Almond did, and the scale upon which they did it? This Officer harmed his own career, which did not affect anyone else other than himself.

MG Ely and MG Almond maligned the careers of thousands of minorities over the course of generations through the implementation of overtly racist policies. Nevertheless, their names were not removed from the USAWC for their deeds. They remain the cornerstones in its foundation and its history. Some Army leaders attempt to convince African Americans to believe that the racist actions of past Army leaders should be forgiven, forgotten, and only focus on the good they did for duty, honor, and country. While in the same breath, they make it a point to make an institutional example out of a man of color for his personal mistakes, and announce to the world that this is what happens to people who dishonor the uniform.

_African Americans in Combat Arms (21st Century)_

Continuing to analyze the challenges of diversity and inclusion beyond the data provided above, a review of the results of the 2014 and 2015 Command Selection List (CSL) for Army Infantry and Armor brigade command provides more context. In 2014, the CSL for BDE command in the Infantry and Armor branches, determined that there were no African Americans selected for Brigade Combat Team (BCT) command. In response to this dynamic, Tom V. Brook wrote an article in USA Today stating, "The
lack of black officers who lead infantry, armor, and field artillery battalions and brigades threatens the Army's effectiveness, disconnects it from American society and deprives black officers of the principal route to top Army posts."47 One might conclude that this was an anomaly, but in 2015, there were very similar results. In 2015, “there were just two African Americans selected to command combat brigades, and just one African American selected to command one BN out of 78 available BNs.”48 For minority Officers, this was not an anomaly, but more a norm of the status quo. This was a pattern that happened to gain public attention. If qualified minorities are not proportionately selected to BN and BDE commands, their pathway to senior Army leadership becomes non-existent.49 When looking at this problem through the lens of historical-mindedness, as outlined in this research, senior Army civilian and military leadership must be willing to see this problem through the lens of the minorities of whom this effects the most.

One of the most relevant and compelling portions of Hampton's book is in an excerpt from an interview he conducted with COL (R) Harry Townsend, who served in both the segregated and integrated Army from the late 1940s through Vietnam. COL Townsend was a member of the 555th Parachute Infantry Regiment (Triple Nickels). In reflecting on his experiences as an African American Officer, COL Townsend stated,


“You didn’t have people [blacks] who were the chief of staff of the division; you had company commanders, but not battalion commanders. You didn’t have regimental commanders. Secondly, if you got the rank they would ship you off to ROTC or someplace like that to keep you from getting command.” 50 Townsend’s insight are reflective of many of the challenges African Americans continue to face today in the 21st Century.

What are the statistical odds of a father and son commanding an active duty Army corps, even more bizarre, the exact same corps? However minuscule and impossible those odds are, the chances of that happening are higher than an African American commanding one. This was the case with III Corps. In the one-hundred-and two-year history of III Corps, the Funks have managed to achieve this. The father, GEN (R) Funk Jr., commanded III Corps in 1991, while his son, GEN Funk III, commanded III Corps in 2018. As of the writing of this SRP, the Army has never had a minority selected to serve as the Army Chief of Staff. III Corps has never had an African American corps commander. The 101st Airborne DIV has never had an African American commander. The 82nd Airborne DIV has had only one African American commander dating back to 1976 (GEN Roscoe Robinson). 51 From 1978 to 2003, there were no African Americans commanding DIVs in the Continental United States (CONUS). 52 However, during that time, there were three African Americans who commanded the 25th ID in Hawaii, and

50 Hampton, p.76.


52 White, p. 16.
three African Americans who commanded the 2nd ID in Korea, both overseas billets. While the Army has made progress on some of these issues, such as the most recent appointments of MG Xavier Brunson commanding the 7th Infantry DIV in 2019, and MG Gary Brito being the first African American to command Fort Benning, Georgia in its one hundred year history, the Army has a long way to go toward proportionately providing these opportunities to minorities.

Similarly, there has not been an African American commander of the elite 75th Ranger Regiment. Although there have been many qualified African American Officers who have led Ranger platoons, commanded Ranger companies, and worked as Operations Officers or Executive Officers within this unit, they still could not break through that barrier of commanding a Ranger Battalion. Most, if not all Regimental commanders have led Ranger platoons and commanded at the company and battalion levels within the Regiment. If an African American Officer is not given the opportunity to compete and command at every level of command inside the Regiment, he is unlikely to ever be considered for command of the Regiment. Why is command in this particular organization significant and unique from a typical Infantry brigade command? It is significant because every Officer that has successfully commanded the 75th Ranger Regiment has gone forward to become a General Officer and reached some of the highest levels of command in the Army.

Senior Leadership

If there was any doubt in anyone’s mind as to the 21st Century problem of diversity in the Armed Forces, particularly in senior leadership, one need not look any

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53 White, p. 16.
further than the chain of command throughout the DOD. Figures 2 – 4 depict the entire senior civilian and military structure of command leadership at the highest levels across the DOD. Of the top eighty-one senior civilian and military leadership positions across the DOD in 2020, there is not one African American in any of these positions. The problem with these charts is that they do not reflect the demographic diversity of the DOD and the U.S.A. The denial of the existence of prejudice, implicit bias, and discrimination within the military force is to deny its existence in the American society.54

Figure 2. Office of Secretary of Defense Senior Leadership55


55 USAWC, Defense Management, Lesson 1, “OSD and Joint Staff Overview,” slide, 16.
In addition to the criticism of the lack of diversity in senior DOD leadership, when examining the 2020 USAWC command and faculty, there is not one active-duty African American Officer on the faculty that provides classroom instruction to the twenty-six seminars. This begs the question, “are there any qualified minorities at the rank of COL, across the DOD, to teach at the USAWC?” If not, why not? If so, why doesn’t the

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56 USAWC, Defense Management, Lesson 1, “OSD and Joint Staff Overview,” slide, 33.

57 USAWC, Defense Management, Lesson 1, “OSD and Joint Staff Overview,” slide, 34.
USAWC have a diverse faculty reflective of the nation, or the services and agencies it serves? When walking down the command hallway at the USAWC, one cannot help but notice that all of the pictures hanging on the wall of all previous commandants are old white men. It is hard to imagine that in the one-hundred and nineteen years of the USAWC being in operation, that there has not been one gender or ethnic minority who has been selected to assume the role and duties as the commandant. How can this status-quo continue to thrive in the 21st Century?

Recommendations

Until senior civilian leadership of the military, and the most senior General Officers (to include minority General Officers), get directly involved on this particular issue, the status quo will remain when it comes to minority opportunities to command combat units at the BN, BDE, DIV, and Corps levels. In addition to the apparent recommendations that have been recognized for decades, on dealing with the baselines of recruitment and ROTC accessions into combat arms branches for minorities, below are additional recommendations that can be implemented by Army leadership:

1. Army senior civilian and military leadership should take decisive action and ensure the next command slate (and future slates) for combat arms branches in BN, BDE, DIV commands are diverse in ethnicity and gender. This will prevent a repeat of the 2014 and 2015 CSL results.\(^{58}\)

2. Army senior civilian and military leadership should examine every combat command (BN-Corps), and every other eligible command that has had neither

minorities nor women to lead them, and end the “white male only” command legacy.

3. The MG Ely 1925 report to the War Department on Negro Man Power should be mandatory reading for all SSC students in the future. This study should become part of the core curriculum of all SSCs, especially the USAWC. This is a sad part of military history that some wish would remain hidden. The fact that the military is currently dealing with the problem of an increase of white supremacy groups⁵⁹ and white nationalism⁶⁰ throughout the DOD⁶¹ is enough justification for this to be taught at the highest levels of PME.

4. The Department of the Army and the USAWC need to reassess the standings of MG Ely and MG Almond, and the prestige bestowed upon them as indicated by their elevated status at the USAWC.

5. The Department of the Army needs to immediately diversify the USAWC command, staff, and faculty members, to reflect the diversity within the Army and across the nation.


Conclusion

With nearly one hundred years removed from the time when MG Ely compiled his recommendations on how the Negro should be used in the time of war, it is ironic that the current USAWC command and faculty in 2020, is comprised of the nearly the same demographics from 1925 with no representation of active-duty African Americans Officers. What does this say about the Army’s concern for diversity, and the Army’s Mission and Vision for the future? Discrimination in the Armed Forces and in the Army in particular, cannot be allowed to continue, if it is to be an example to the nation that proclaims “people are the centerpiece of the Army.”

COL (R) Charles Allen, an African American civilian faculty member, wrote an article for the Army Times in 2014 stating, “No matter how many commissions, panels, boards, or RAND studies, the results are still the same: a lack of minority officers in senior leader positions. As long as the military says “we are working on a solution,” it will be easy to push that can down the road for generations.”

Here we are, nearly one hundred years and several generations from 1925, yet the Army continues to struggle with discrimination, implicit biases, and institutional challenges that hinder African Americans from proportionately commanding combat arms units at the BN, BDE, DIV, Corps, and above.

This SRP is not about Affirmative Action. It is about taking firm action to fix a long-lingering problem. This is what Officers do on a continuum throughout their careers. They solve complex-wicked problems without hesitation. This problem is not

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Volatile unless there are senior leaders who refuse to stand up for fairness and diversity across the Army. It is not Uncertain unless there are senior leaders who doubt the fact that discrimination exists in the Army in 2020. It is not Complex, and neither is it Ambiguous. Although this problem is not simple, the facts speak for themselves.

Just like the incorporation of women into the Infantry, Rangers, and Special Forces, people did not like it, did not want to change it, but quickly figured out how to implement directives that were pushed down from the top. In Secretary McCarthy’s address to the AUSA conference in 2019, he stated that the problems that the Army faces must be dealt with from the grassroots. This particular problem of racial discrimination in commands of BNs, BDEs, DIVs, and Corps that exist within the combat arms branches cannot be fixed at the grassroots. This is a problem that senior civilian leaders and senior General Officers must embrace amongst themselves and take action to resolve immediately. This SRP is not advocating to put unqualified leaders into command positions for the sake of perception and appearing to be above any form of discrimination. It is about African Americans having a fair, equal, and just opportunity to command these particular types of units, and junior minority Officers believing that they have a chance to succeed in combat arms branches in the 21st Century and beyond.

Along with the efforts of senior leaders, every member in the Armed Forces must take a stand and say something, when they see something. To close with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

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64 Martin Luther King Jr., (excerpt from Speech at Riverside Church, Manhattan, NY), April 4, 1967.