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RACE AND INCLUSIVITY IN THE US MILITARY

Toward a Racially Inclusive Military

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ABSTRACT: Racialized structural inequalities and related social biases in US society and replicated in the military hinder diversity and inclusion efforts necessary to maintain a ready force. Examining the history of Blacks in the military through a social science lens helps explain this challenge and reveals the military must both promote relationships that challenge power imbalances and assess the impact of cultural imperialism on standards and evaluations.

The Secretary of Defense recently committed to identify ways to “increase racial diversity and ensure equal opportunity across all ranks . . . ensuring the Armed Forces look more like the broader society we serve.”¹ Such a commitment is necessary, but while representative diversity can be an indicator of organizational diversity, it does not measure inclusivity. An inclusive military must consider the experiences of minority servicemembers and respond appropriately to the biased systems and culture with which these individuals contend.

Although integration in the military did not equate to representative diversity, and a diverse force has not equated to an inclusive one, leadership committed to addressing biases and inequalities provides an opportunity to effect systemic change. The US military can begin the deliberate process of creating a more representative and inclusive environment for all servicemembers by (1) utilizing a social scientifically grounded approach recognizing social inequalities are the result of historicized structural inequalities and processes and (2) highlighting meaningful social interaction as an essential mechanism for change.

Historical analysis reveals systemic bias characterizes the social order of the United States of America. These social biases are replicated in the United States military and are manifested as differences in life chances—including distribution of resources and risks, and differences in lived experiences—including interactions with institutions that regulate access to these resources and exposure to risks. As this research demonstrates, social inequalities and the resulting disparities are not just the fault of individual bad actors; more accurately, they are the result of systemic shortcomings born of structural inequality and institutional social biases.

Normative belief systems and values that advance and privilege the perspectives of social majorities and simultaneously constrain and

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1. Mark T. Esper, “Message to the Force on DOD Diversity and Inclusiveness,” June 18, 2020, Pentagon, Arlington, VA, transcript, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2224438/secretary-mark-t-esper-message-to-the-force-on-dod-diversity-and-inclusiveness>.

discriminate against the perspectives of social minorities undergird and drive social inequality.²

While Asian, Native, and Latino Americans have all faced racial discrimination in the United States, Black American socialization in a society with historical roots in the race-based chattel slavery of Africans is unique. While each branch in the military has a history of social systemic inequalities, the Army provides the most robust baseline from which to apply social theory to department-wide integration and diversity efforts. As such, this work utilizes a social scientific lens to analyze the history of Blacks in the Army to provide insight as to how systemic social inequalities are replicated in the military.

Social Inequalities in a Racialized Society

Systemic social inequalities entail arrangements existing across multiple dimensions of society and at multiple levels of influence within society that are simultaneously advantageous to majority populations and disadvantageous to minority populations.³ Furthermore, systemic social inequalities are the result of the combined processes of structural inequalities—beliefs and values forming normative frameworks.⁴ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues a “racialized social system” like the United States allocates “differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups occurring along racial lines.”⁵

These racialization processes lead to a racial structure of society with “a set of social relations and practices based on racial distinctions.”⁶ The process of categorizing society into social groups with a set of corresponding “social relations and practices” based on an ideology determined by the social majority, finds its way into every aspect of society.⁷ The pervasiveness of the ideology and process, combined with its persistence over time, makes it systemic.

Race in America has roots in the eighteenth century when settlers used what people looked like to identify various population groups in colonial America and “established a rigid hierarchy of socially exclusive categories” with “unequal rank and status.”⁸ As the power-wielding social majority, White elites had the privilege of defining and assigning membership to racial categories. By rationalizing inherent inequality, the White majority justified the race-based chattel slavery of Africans and the oppression of Native Americans. Established during this time, the Army adopted policies of exclusion, segregation, and quotas to address

2. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); and Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. George E. G. Catlin, trans. Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller, 8th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938).

3. Jay A. Pearson, *Lecture on Structural Inequality* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2019).

4. Pearson, *Structural Inequality*.

5. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 465–80.

6. Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism,” 474.

7. Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism,” 474.

8. American Anthropological Association (AAA), “AAA Statement on Race,” May 17, 1998, <https://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2583>.

racial minority service. The reputation of Black service was shaped by a belief Blacks were biologically inferior to Whites, a social order that imposed this belief, and subsequent beliefs that Blacks were a detriment to morale and incapable of performing combat duties.⁹

Race, however, does not exist as a biological differentiator within humanity; rather race exists as a social construct. Ninety-four percent of physical variation “lies *within* so-called racial groups” and “conventional geographic ‘racial’ groupings differ from one another only in about 6% of their genes.”¹⁰ But as the social majority developed systems, structures, and institutions around the concept of race, they succeeded in the social assignment of “some groups to perpetual low status, while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth.”¹¹

Social majorities—in the United States, disproportionately wealthy White men—define group distinctions, assign group identity to the masses, and utilize the group distinctions as a means to maintain superior position.¹² The long-term impacts of these historical phenomena are not trivial as race remains a relevant social distinction across virtually all institutions in the United States. Many servicemembers’ experiences have been overshadowed by White fears of Black uprising and denials of the capability of Blacks to serve effectively.

Consider the following examples: Blacks were eliminated from the force through policy on account of the fear of Black servicemen mounting a revolt against race-based chattel slavery after the Revolutionary War; Blacks were denied service at the beginning of the Civil War; Blacks were denied commissioned officer leadership positions and relegated to auxiliary and service specialties after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863; Blacks were relegated to all-Black units after the Civil War; and Blacks were forced into the “menial occupations” of support positions in World War I.¹³

The relationship between the social majority and the minority is a result of the nature of social hierarchies in which the social majority holds hierarchy-enhancing roles and “allocates social resources to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinate groups.”¹⁴ Research shows the likelihood of hierarchy-enhancing ideology and discriminatory practices increases when individuals serve in hierarchy-enhancing roles within a hierarchy-enhancing institution.¹⁵ When Blacks were assigned to combat roles in World War I, the White

9. Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes & Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

10. AAA, “Statement on Race.”

11. AAA, “Statement on Race.”

12. Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism”; and Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

13. US Army Center of Military History (ACMH), “The Army and Diversity,” ACMH, n.d., <https://history.army.mil/html/faq/diversity.html>; and Martin Binkin and Mark J. Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1982).

14. Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, “Social Dominance Theory,” in *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, vol. 2 (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012), 419.

15. Sidanius and Pratto, “Social Dominance Theory,” 426.

officers over them were “so prejudiced against the troops that the unit lacked organizational cohesion.”¹⁶

Whites worked actively from their hierarchy-enhancing positions to maintain control over the narrative surrounding Black service. White officers denied successful Black units the appropriate honors for their successes in multiple conflicts.¹⁷ Army leadership carelessly assigned Black units to unaccepting communities in the south, leading to a deterioration of the reputation of and secret hangings of Black soldiers.¹⁸

By the eve of World War II, the small number of active duty Black soldiers—six percent—had primarily been consigned to hierarchy-attenuating positions.¹⁹ Despite the 1940 Selective Training and Service Act against race-based policies on drafting or accepting volunteers for service, Whites secured their position by keeping the ranks segregated, limiting the number of Black officers in officer candidate schools and ensuring the number of Blacks permitted into the Army did not exceed their national representation.²⁰

Prejudicial and biased policy shaped where, when, and how Blacks could serve to the benefit of the White majority. Personnel shortages in December 1944 required the Army to open its infantry ranks to Black units during the Battle of the Bulge, but as the need for more troops faded with the end of World War II, Blacks—three percent—were all but weeded out of combat arms units.²¹ The Civil Rights Movement began to shift the national narrative, but the nature of oppression resulted in a lack of accountability and urgency in President Truman’s 1948 declaration of equality in the armed services, and the Army remained heavily segregated well into the Korean War.

Prior to the official desegregation order in 1951, two studies led by White general officers concluded for the sake of unit morale—the comfort of those in hierarchy-enhancing positions—the Army must maintain a cap on Black soldiers at 10 percent of the total force and continue limits on occupational specialties open to Black soldiers.²² The military teams came to these conclusions despite the success of integrated units in the Korean War. Conversely, two civilian-led studies with no stake in the military’s hierarchical structure—The Fahy Committee and Project Clear—recommended full integration to improve overall

16. ACMH, “The Army and Diversity.”

17. ACMH, “The Army and Diversity.”

18. ACMH, “The Army and Diversity”; and Binkin and Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military*.

19. Binkin and Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military*.

20. Binkin and Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military*.

21. Binkin and Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military*; and Leo Bogart, ed., *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army: Two Original 1951 Field Reports* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1969).

22. Historical Division, Headquarters US Army Europe (USAREUR), *Integration of Negro and White Troops in the US Army, Europe, 1952–1954* (Stuttgart, Germany: Headquarters, USAREUR, 1956), now declassified and on file with US Army Center of Military History, Historical Manuscripts Collection, no. 8-3.1 CK 2, <https://history.army.mil/documents/cold-war/EI-Ch1.htm>.

effectiveness as Black soldiers performed on par with Whites and found the Army proved more effective with integrated units.²³

The Systemic Nature of Oppression

The continued acceptability of segregation in the military despite the ostensible unacceptability of racism exemplifies how oppression, a fundamental cause of persistent racialized disparate outcomes, extends beyond individual action and into ideologies, norms, and values that form biased systems and institutions. Political philosopher Iris Young argues minorities contend with five dimensions of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.²⁴

This more comprehensive conceptualization of oppression addresses its influence absent explicit expression. Because oppression is normative and systemic, it may not be overt and easily recognizable, especially to the majority. Such subtlety often leads to a denial that oppression exists because policies do not support explicitly oppressive acts and majority population members are unlikely to experience or witness oppression.

Having integrated in the midst of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the military was several steps ahead of the nation, but the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement brought awareness to persistent oppression of racial minorities. Whites, no longer concerned with the fighting capabilities of Blacks, found Blacks suitable for service in lieu of Whites suffering their fate. Between 1960 and 1966, statistics show Blacks were more likely to be drafted, sent to Vietnam, placed in combat units, and killed or wounded in battle, suffering almost a quarter of enlisted casualties.²⁵ It took an outcry from social movements at home to decrease the disproportionate deaths of Black servicemembers before the end of the war.²⁶

In 1968 the Department of Defense displayed a lack of understanding regarding the social manifestations of oppression when it declared it had “officially eliminated discrimination in the Military Services.”²⁷ In its assessment, military leadership only considered actions committed at the level of the discursive conscious. To limit the analysis of oppression to the discursive conscious (an individual can verbalize “what” and “why”) is to assume individuals acknowledge and verbally express everything they do, all the time.²⁸ But as Giddens outlines in his three-level theory of subjectivity, the unconscious governs most actions and interactions at the levels of practical conscious and the basic security system.²⁹

23. Bogart, *Desegregation of the U.S. Army*.

24. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 49–63.

25. Binkin and Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military*.

26. James E. Westheider, “African Americans, Civil Rights, and the Armed Forces during the Vietnam War,” in *Integrating the Military: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation since World War II*, ed. Douglas Walter Bristol Jr. and Heather Marie Stur (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

27. Westheider, “African Americans,” 107.

28. Young, *Justice*.

29. Young, *Justice*.

Although reluctant military leaders changed course in the early 1970s and acknowledged individual and institutional racism still existed within the force, the Army Diversity Office today has publications revealing a lack of understanding about the historical impact of systemic social bias and inequality—these materials indicate affirmative action efforts eliminated the negative effects of the past.³⁰

Evidence of systemic social inequalities in the absence of intentionally harmful acts indicates oppressive acts generate at “the basic level of identity security and sense of autonomy required for any coherent action in social contexts.”³¹ Because overt interpersonal racial discrimination is no longer socially acceptable or desired, most people do not knowingly oppress others, which could possibly explain why racial minorities in the military report witnessing racism at a greater rate than Whites.³²

Socialization in a society with discriminatory roots—racism—unconsciously engages the basic security system for self-preservation when individuals fear compromised social position or socioeconomic displacement. As a result, social majorities exhibit hostile behaviors toward minorities all the while “rarely conscious of their actions or how they make the others feel.”³³ The engagement of the basic security system explains why the military has historically considered the overrepresentation of serving racial minorities within the armed services compared with their national representation a “success” and failed to consider it necessary to address disparate distributions of minorities across the force by categories such as rank and occupational specialty.

Contentious and violent race relations throughout the military following the death of Martin Luther King Jr. prompted congressional action to address race relations in the military, and led then Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to establish the Inter-Service Task Force on Education and Race Relations.³⁴ Subsequently, in 1971 the Department of Defense established the Race Relations Education Board to “set guidelines and establish policy for education in race relations for the armed forces” and tasked the Defense Race Relations Institute—now the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute—with implementation.³⁵ The Board saw the need to address and educate servicemembers on the root causes of bias, racism, and inequalities, but having personally experienced over a decade of military training

30. US Army Diversity Office, “Army Diversity: Diversity & Leadership” (PowerPoint slides, Army Diversity Office, November 14, 2011), https://www.armydiversity.army.mil/document/Army_Diversity_Slides.pdf; and Westheider, “African Americans.”

31. Young, *Justice*, 131.

32. Leo Shane, “Signs of White Supremacy, Extremism up Again in Poll of Active-Duty Troops,” *Military Times*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>.

33. Young, *Justice*, 133–4.

34. Isaac Hampton II, “Reform in Ranks: The History of the Defense Race Relations Institute, 1971–2014,” in *Integrating the Military: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation since World War II*, ed. Douglas Walter Bristol Jr. and Heather Marie Stur (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

35. Hampton II, “Reform in Ranks.”

on equal opportunity, I can attest this training falls woefully short of expectations.³⁶

Social Inequalities and Biases Today

The lack of education and acknowledgment by the social majority of the continued existence of White privilege, systemic racism, and systemic social inequalities reflects a lack of understanding of the negative impact of a racialized society on social minorities. Lawrence Bobo terms the evolution of explicit racist ideologies into the now “covert, sophisticated, culture-centered, and subtle racist ideology” that denies the government’s responsibility to undo racial inequality as “laissez-faire racism.”³⁷ Laissez-faire racism “protects White privilege, rationalizes Black disadvantage, and expands racial inequality” based on a demand for “color-blindness.”³⁸

This “laissez-faire racism,” along with other mechanisms, has permitted the systemic social inequalities experienced by Black Americans to continue and in some cases widen. The idea that socially unaccepted ideologies of the past mar the modern, socially esteemed value of holding every human being equal is often dismissed by those who view America as a post-racial society. But the evidence presented here demands a response recognizing systemic social inequalities are a result of historicized social biases to which the military is not immune.

Career and wealth. Racial minorities experience a lower return on skills that training programs and education cannot overcome. After controlling for variables that might influence employer decision making, researchers in 2004 found despite having the same qualifications, résumés with “White sounding names” received 50 percent more callbacks for interviews and more than three times the return on skills than résumés with “African American sounding names.”³⁹ Similar rates of bias were found in a 2017 study.⁴⁰

Black officers in the military experience similar lower returns on skills at senior officer ranks. Military promotion rates differ by race and gender throughout the course of a career. A 2012 study found that up to the rank of O4, promotion rates were similar across gender and race, but from the O4 to O6 ranks, rates declined for non-Whites.⁴¹

36. Hampton II, “Reform in Ranks.”

37. Lawrence Bobo, “Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today,” *Daedalus* 140, no. 2 (2011): 11–36; and Bobo, “Laissez-Faire Racism,” (part of lecture series on structural racism and the root causes of prejudice, University of Maryland, October 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3-FBsMzILQ>.

38. Bobo, “Laissez-Faire Racism.”

39. Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination,” *American Economic Review* 94, no. 4 (2004): 991–1013.

40. Lincoln Quillian et al., “Meta-Analysis of Field Experiments Shows No Change in Racial Discrimination in Hiring over Time,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 41 (October 10, 2017).

41. Beth J. Asch, Trey Miller, and Alessandro Malchiodi, *A New Look at Gender and Minority Differences in Officer Career Progression in the Military* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR1159.html.

Another study determined White military officers were 29 percent more likely to be promoted than Black officers.⁴² Additionally, Navy officer evaluation reports for White officers indicate they were more likely to be recommended for early promotion, whereas Black officers were recommended for on-time or no promotion.⁴³

Racial disparities in wealth over time provide evidence of the persistent nature of systemic social inequalities. When examining net worth, a measure of wealth, only 6 of the 615 American billionaires are Black.⁴⁴ Often transferred intergenerationally, wealth—a measure of socioeconomic status—has remained elusive to the majority of racial minorities due to adverse and discriminatory government policies including redlining and the denial of housing benefits.⁴⁵ Non-White households are less likely to benefit from the recovery of financial markets due to a reduced likelihood of owning stocks through retirement accounts.⁴⁶

During the economic recovery following the 2008 recession, household wealth for non-Hispanic Whites increased by 2.4 percent but decreased for non-Hispanic Blacks by 33 percent, and middle-income household wealth decreased for Blacks by 47 percent and Hispanics by 55 percent, but only declined for middle-income Whites by 31 percent.⁴⁷ In 2016, the median wealth for White households was ten times that of Black households and eight times that of Hispanic households.⁴⁸ The inability of racial minorities to hedge off threats to wealth has widened the inequality gap.

Information on the wealth of servicemembers is not readily available, but racialized disparities exist in other socioeconomic status indicators in the military—rank and occupational specialty. In 2006, 80 percent of Army generals were from the majority White male combat arms branches.⁴⁹ The Military Leadership Diversity Commission's final report identified a significant reduction in representation of racial minorities at the flag/general officer level and found non-Hispanic White males were the only officer corps demographic overrepresented

42. James Burk and Evelyn Espinoza, "Race Relations within the US Military," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012).

43. Burk and Espinoza, "Race Relations."

44. Taylor Nicole Rogers, "There Are Only 5 Black Billionaires in the United States," *Business Insider*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/black-billionaires-in-the-united-states-2020-2>.

45. William A. Darity, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

46. Rakesh Kochhar and Richard Fry, "Wealth Inequality Has Widened along Racial, Ethnic Lines since End of Great Recession," *Pew Research Center* (blog), December 12, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>.

47. Kochhar and Fry, "Wealth Inequality"; and Kochhar and Anthony Cilluffo, "How US Wealth Inequality Has Changed since the Great Recession, by Race, Ethnicity, and Income," *Pew Research Center* (blog), November 1, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/01/how-wealth-inequality-has-changed-in-the-u-s-since-the-great-recession-by-race-ethnicity-and-income/>.

48. Kochhar and Cilluffo, "How US Wealth."

49. Nelson Lim et al., *Officer Classification and the Future of Diversity among Senior Military Leaders* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA507944.pdf>.

in the military.⁵⁰ The White-male-dominated combat arms branches are the military elite, and as such, they “set the policies and procedures and determine criteria for promotion.”⁵¹

Health care. Overwhelming evidence shows racialized health differences in the United States persist over time. Studies reveal health-care providers with positive implicit bias for Whites prescribed reduced pain treatment for Blacks.⁵² Similarly, pediatricians with positive White implicit bias prescribed narcotic pain medication for Black child patients at decreased rates.⁵³ Black women are at increased risk of stillbirth—63 percent higher—as compared to White women, and those living in high socioeconomic status White neighborhoods had the highest prevalence of low birth weights.⁵⁴

Only one of the aforementioned studies considered the impact of social bias on female servicemembers, finding similar, albeit attenuated, racial differences in birth outcomes were present in the military.⁵⁵ A single study cannot lead to a determination of systemic social bias and racism on the health outcomes of minorities serving in the military, but the systemic nature of inequalities should propel the military to investigate further.

Criminal justice. Inequalities also exist elsewhere in the military. Historically, Blacks were routinely denied due process and more likely than Whites to be executed.⁵⁶ Although the military has made significant strides to improve and disparities across race are not readily apparent in military justice sentencing, differences are evident “at the gateway into the military justice system where commanding officers have discretion to determine what charges and punishments (if any) might be levied before a formal process of courts-martial is convened.”⁵⁷ Biases at early stages

50. “From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st-Century Military” (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, March 15, 2011), https://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/Documents/Special%20Feature/MLDC_Final_Report.pdf.

51. Lim et al., *Officer Classification*, 3.

52. Kelly M. Hoffman et al., “Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs about Biological Differences between Blacks and Whites,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 16 (April 19, 2016): 4296.

53. Janice A. Sabin and Anthony G. Greenwald, “The Influence of Implicit Bias on Treatment Recommendations for 4 Common Pediatric Conditions: Pain, Urinary Tract Infection, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Asthma,” *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 5 (March 15, 2012): 988–95.

54. Cheryl A. Blackmore et al., “Is Race a Risk Factor or a Risk Marker for Preterm Delivery?,” *Ethnicity & Disease* 3, no. 4 (1993): 372–77; Catherine L. Kothari et al., “The Interplay of Race, Socioeconomic Status and Neighborhood Residence upon Birth Outcomes in a High Black Infant Mortality Community,” *SSM -Population Health* 2 (2016): 859–67; and Paula A. Braveman et al., “The Role of Socioeconomic Factors in Black-White Disparities in Preterm Birth,” *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 4 (April 2015): 694–702.

55. Blackmore et al., “Race a Risk Factor.”

56. Binkin and Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military*.

57. Burk and Espinoza, “Race Relations.”

of the military justice process across branches result in an increased likelihood of Black incarceration as compared to Whites.⁵⁸

Disparate outcomes across multiple sectors of society, at multiple levels, and by social distinctions supports the proposition systemic social inequalities exist in the modern period. The power of the social majority to create narratives identifying individual and cultural differences as the cause of inequalities leads to such explanations becoming melded—often unknowingly—into structures, institutions, culture, and individuals. Per this perspective, systemic bias and racism are rarely, if ever, implicated as the causal mechanisms. As a result, oppressed groups are obligated by society to “fix” the problem of their victimization, and to do so without access to resources or power.

This pattern and its results are so well integrated and normalized in society that the average person, majority or minority, often remains unaware of its existence. Policy reforms rarely address majority oppression of minorities as the root cause of inequality, and biased systems remain entrenched, perpetuated, and can even be accelerated. In short, systemic racial oppression continues largely unrecognized, unnamed, and unchecked.

Recommendations

Award-winning journalist Jim Carrier argued America’s “most successful integration story . . . was written by its armed forces.”⁵⁹ In the 1950s and 1960s, the military was the model example for successful integration of Black Americans into a formerly openly segregated institution.⁶⁰ Even though the US military was ahead of broader society, now, 66 years after the military abolished the last all-Black active duty unit, systemic social biases and resulting racial inequalities persist despite evolving department-wide diversity and inclusion programs. These programs fall short of adequately acknowledging and addressing the impact a racialized American society has on those who serve.

The military cannot presume diversity equals or reliably translates into inclusion. These latter processes necessarily require members of social majority groups to acknowledge privilege born of systemic social bias and then commit to leveraging this privilege to create and secure opportunities to increase representation, engagement, and interaction from diverse populations across multiple dimensions of identity. Accordingly, the battle to dismantle systemic social inequalities requires persistent, pervasive, and deliberate action from members of all social groups with a vested interest in doing so.

58. US Government Accountability Office “Military Justice: DoD and the Coast Guard Need to Improve Their Capabilities to Assess Racial and Gender Disparities” (report to the Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives, May 2019), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/699380.pdf>; and Burk and Espinoza, “Race Relations.”

59. Jim Carrier, *A Traveler’s Guide to the Civil Rights Movement* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2004), 28.

60. Bogart, *Desegregation of the U.S. Army*.

“In social planning, a realistic confrontation of the present is always the first step to reshaping it for the future.”⁶¹ Relying on practical consciousness to explain inequalities has failed to produce change, and inequalities in various quality of life measures persist. The military’s focus must expand beyond addressing individual prejudice to identifying fallacies and biases operating at the basic security system level as a result of a structurally biased society. By acknowledging systemic social inequalities exist within its ranks, driven by historical inertia, the military can begin to establish a foundation for a culture of inclusivity.

Inclusivity requires the military to plan for and require deliberate, everyday action at the practical, conscious level. By acknowledging ideologies of the past created power structures and an oppressive system that advantages White males and disadvantages almost all others, the military can begin to dismantle institutionalized bias as well as biases that exist at the basic security-system level. The military must then focus on the power-wielding elite, present the historicized evidence of inequalities, and create space for open conversations among diverse population groups.

Military leadership must cultivate an environment and shape policy to bring awareness to and challenge majority privilege, social biases, systemic oppression, and the resulting inequalities. Thus far, policies aimed at addressing social biases have been insufficient because they do not require a personal connection or cultivating relationships across social distinctions. To begin the process of eradicating systemic social inequalities, the social majority must care more about the well-being of minorities than protecting their own privileged position.

The research from Project Clear revealed integration was successful because soldiers of different races were forced to be in proximity to each other. Interviews revealed White soldiers in integrated units had more respect for Black soldiers, and Black soldiers in integrated units had more affinity for White soldiers and the mission.⁶² A 2015 Gallup report found Blacks attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) consistently experienced a social environment on campus three times more supportive than that of non-HBCUs, regardless of the race of the professor or mentor who created a supportive environment.⁶³

This differential experience between Blacks attending HBCUs and non-HBCUs indicates Blacks are disproportionately negatively impacted by the social environment of non-HBCU institutions— institutions that do not consider social biases with which Blacks contend. Meaningful relationships and social interactions are the differentiators for greater success, evidenced in the Project Clear and Gallup findings mentioned above.

61. Bogart, *Desegregation of the U.S. Army*, 41.

62. Bogart, *Desegregation of the U.S. Army*.

63. Gallup and USA Funds, *Gallup-USA Funds Minority College Graduates Report* (Washington, DC: Gallup, 2015), <https://www.gallup.com/services/186359/gallup-usa-funds-minority-college-graduates-report-pdf.aspx>.

Through meaningful social interaction, the military elite can be challenged to leverage their social privilege for right action and relinquish exclusive elite decision-making practices. Prior recommendations from the military have included encouraging mentorship within social distinctions. This approach falls short—it maintains a power imbalance, places the responsibility of dismantling the system on minorities alone, and does not challenge social majority culture. Conversely, the military should seek mentorship programs that cross social distinctions. The culture around these relationships must promote meaningful social interactions extending beyond the office to include families and recreational activities. The military must also put measures in place to assess leadership commitment to such efforts and capture how each servicemember experiences those relationships.

Finally, the military must divorce itself from the idea it is an egalitarian meritocracy. Military culture reflects the preferences and norms of its social majority—the White male infantryman. As a result, minority cultural practices are often considered by the social majority to be pathological and dysfunctional, and result in an elitist evaluation system. Until 1972, cultural imperialism in the Armed Forces Qualification Test disadvantaged Blacks by assessing culture more than intelligence, subsequently forcing Blacks into the unskilled services and supply specialties or into the high-risk combat arms specialties.⁶⁴

Recommendations for Black soldiers to receive training on military culture assimilation to combat their higher likelihood of receiving military justice disciplinary action furthers the culturally imperialistic nature of oppression.⁶⁵ This ideology absolves the majority of responsibility and instead looks to strip social minorities of their identity by requiring they conform in order to survive. The military would be well served to closely review all regulations and methods of evaluation to determine if positive biases privilege social majority culture.

Conclusion

National security is dependent on a diverse force, but racial minorities have historically been seen as tools for White success. Permitting racial minorities to serve in conflict provided the larger force needed for mission success as far back as the Civil War. More recently, the military has valued diverse servicemembers for their contributions in multicultural environments around the globe. Opening the ranks has allowed the military to benefit from the power inherent in a large, multicultural force; but systemic and structural biases prevent the military from experiencing the benefits of an inclusive force.

Inclusivity requires the acknowledgment that every individual has value as a person, independent of an imposed valuation based on mission

64. Westheider, "African Americans."

65. Mickey R. Dansby, "Racial Disparities in Military Incarceration Rates: An Overview and Research Strategy," in *Managing Diversity in the Military*, ed. Mickey R. Dansby, James B. Stewart, and Schuyler C. Webb (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2001).

contribution. While quantitative diversity at every echelon and within every career field must become the norm in military culture, it cannot become the measure of success for diversity and inclusion efforts. The Department of Defense must focus efforts on renegotiating existing social majority/minority relationships in a way that acknowledges and challenges long-standing power imbalances and reevaluates the impact of cultural imperialism on biased formal standards and criteria.

In the final analysis, the military must continue to lead the way for change by example. The military must take up the charge to attack inequalities at their core by acknowledging where it finds itself wanting on these issues, how it got there, and the importance of its people in making positive changes toward a future where all groups and individuals composing them are seen, heard, and valued.

