

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION STILL NEEDED IN THE MILITARY TODAY

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Abstract

For over thirty years the United States Military has been a leader in promoting equality for minorities in the work place with fair practices and equal opportunities for everyone regardless of one's background. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 14th Amendment provided minorities the chance to excel in the military from the lowest rank of private, to the highest position of Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff. Opponents are in a constant battle to reverse the Civil Rights Act on racial discrimination by calling it a policy to make quotas and an ideology that has long outlived its time. As an Equal Opportunity Advisor, Affirmative Action is a vital tool needed to continue promoting racial equality in the Military.

Affirmative Action Still Needed in the Military Today

Greg Stanford says in his article “Today’s Diverse Military an Affirmative Action Success”: “They look like America – these young men and women risking their lives in Iraq. Oh, sure, the scions of the elite are scarcer than their numbers back home warrant, among the grunts anyway – an argument for the draft. After all, the elite put these young soldiers – other people’s children – in harm’s way” (1).

George Washington wrote a letter in 1776 addressing the positive lessons that were learned during the Revolutionary War when the ranks included different people from all over the Thirteen Colonies. Today, the primary reasons for affirmative action are to fight discrimination in the work place, achieve racial and gender diversity, and reduce the poverty level of certain groups that have been left behind. With the promise of “everyone can reach the top if only you try” are still the ideas that are presented to young men and women who are recruited for positions in the military.

Over a thirty-year period the military has been the leader in trying to establish a proper proportion of minorities in the work place and setting up systems that keep discrimination in the work place under the watchful eyes of the Equal Opportunity Advisor. As early as 1949, only 0.9 percent of officers were African American compared to the majority of white officers. This disproportionate number reinforced the continued discrimination of minorities from the ranks of the military.

During the 1960s and 1970s, with the Vietnam Conflict going on and the increase of minorities joining the enlisted ranks, discrimination was at an all time high with only five percent

of the officers being minorities. Without the proper mix of minority officers to the ratio of enlisted minorities in the military, unfair practices continued to keep the performance at an all time low. For over thirty years the military has kept an aggressive recruiting campaign to close the gap of minority officers in comparison to their white counterparts. This, along with the introduction of the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey, has shown that the races are center mass when it comes to their opinion if their unit is committed to equal opportunity, unlike the degree of difference between minority female officers and majority male officers.

One only has to wonder if the military really has it right, after all isn't the military an extension of society with their numerous problems that are flashed across the evening news anywhere in America. The proof is in the leadership schools where equality is prevalent in the ethnic mixture of students from abroad the military striving for the goal of success and the right to attain the top positions without the handcuffs of prejudice.

During the early part of the Iraq war, those killed in action were 20 White, 5 African American and 3 Hispanic, which represents an accurate ratio to today's military (Estrich 1). This is due in part to the success of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 14th Amendment (Murry 1). Affirmative Action allows for a minority to attend college and become commissioned as an officer in the military. This system has produced outstanding officers such as Retired General Colin Powell, Retired General Ricardo Sanchez and many more throughout the past thirty to forty years since the introduction of this system.

The Global War on Terrorism has placed the military in harms way since the beginning of 2001 with the insertion into Afghanistan and Iraq. Units from across the United States come

about as racially diverse with context to the population make up back home. These diverse units display the equality that has taken root and continues to flourish since the inception days of integration no matter what ethnic background individuals are from. This is evident that the system the military has put in place has and is still working to this day.

Units deployed in the Operation Enduring Freedom while I was the Equal Opportunity Advisor, consisted of very diverse demographics when it came to the make up of the unit. Even though there were always small complaints from one soldier about another, very few ever consisted of racial discrimination. I found many units had excellent leadership with strong policies that prevented those types of actions from their soldiers. Leadership is still the key to success in units operating on equal treatment for all soldiers regardless of ethnic background.

Today's Affirmative Action is still under fire by right-wing ideologists, bigots and organizations that are bent on the dissolution of the idea that minorities should be given an extra advantage when it comes to recruiting and being accepted into the universities. "A different prospective...diversity...enhances our educational process," says David Vetter, dean of admissions at Annapolis (qtd.in Hunt 2). A diverse Officer Corp is a fair representation for all enlisted minorities enabling the officers to teach, coach, and mentor while maintaining positive role models for service members who have come from poverty-stricken environments.

"Discrimination in the job market is an important cause of high poverty rates among U.S children" (Bergmann 10). For many minorities the military is the only way out of an environment that treats people unfairly. Unfair work ethics and policies continue to keep the access to advancement down to a controlled level. Affirmative action plans were designed to

afford women and minorities the opportunity to seek and attain jobs that once were out of their reach. Many opponents of affirmative action have tried to reverse the Civil Rights Act on racial discrimination calling it a policy to make quotas. The belief is that the system has already intergraded itself and there is no need for the continuance of this program.

People who live in poverty have the same chance as any other to work their way up the ladder of success and on to a better lifestyle. This is the idea of a society that is controlled by a majority of white males who are in the top power positions who and make and enforce the rules that seem to change with the blowing of the wind. This system has managed to keep minorities and women at a disadvantage and make it impossible for them to ever get above the poverty line.

The only organization that has practiced a fair and unbiased recruitment policy is the military, with the promises of fair practices of promotion and the ability to rise to the highest ranks regardless of ethnicity or gender. Though not perfect, the military has given women and minorities the ability to rise above the lower class and move into the middle class, thus providing their children with a better start than the generation before.

Some would say that Affirmative Action is an ideology that has outlived its time, but statistics show that minorities, even though they are better off now than before, are still subject to discrimination and unfair practices today. If everyone in and outside the military practiced equality, there would not be a need for Equal Opportunity Advisors. Unfortunately, there are those few who remain set in their ways of hatred that have to be found, rooted out and given the opportunity to change or choose another career field. Affirmative Action remains a vital tool for

the Army that is needed to help keep racial equality pointed in the right direction, for if not for Affirmative Action where would we be now.

Would the work place have an equal amount of women and minorities? Would children have the opportunity to live better lives and make accomplishments based on the content of their character and not the color of their skin? Affirmative Action is a tool that is very much still needed today in this land of opportunity.

Biography
SGM Terry R. Schneider

SGM Terry R. Schneider was born on 27 April 1966 in Winter Haven, Fl. He entered the Army on 23 June 1984 where he attended basic training and Advanced Individual Training (AIT); where he became an 11B Infantryman. In January 1985, he attended Airborne School and was then assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division as a Mortar man.

He has served in a wide variety of assignments throughout his career. SGM Schneider is currently attending the U.S. Sergeants Major Academy, Class 57. He previously served as the Equal Opportunity Advisor for the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vicenza, Italy. He has served as a Rifleman, Team Leader, Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Scout Platoon Sergeant, Rifle Company First Sergeant, HHC BDE First Sergeant while assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division.

SGM Schneider has completed several military courses and schools to include the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, Primary Leadership Development Course, Battle Staff NCO Course, Equal Opportunity Advisor Course, Equal Opportunity Leader's Course, Jumpmaster School, Ranger School, Air Assault School, Instructor Trainer Course, Light Infantry Master Gunner Course and Javelin Gunners Course. SGM Schneider has earned 49 college semester hours towards his Bachelors of Criminal Justice from Central Texas College.

His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star (3rd award), Meritorious Service Medal (2nd award), Army Commendation Medal (4th award), Army Achievement Medal (6th award), Good Conduct Medal (7th award), National Defense Service Medal (w/bronze star), South West Asia Medal (w/2 bronze stars), Iraq Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, Non Commissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon (Numeral 3), National Defense Ribbon, Overseas Ribbon (Numeral 3), Saudi Arabia Defense Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal, Ranger Tab, Combat Infantryman Award (2nd award), Expert Infantryman Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, Senior Parachutist Badge, Parachutist Badge, Air Assault Badge, French Jump Wings, Canadian Jump Wings, German Jump Wings, and Expert Marksmanship Badge for Carbine.

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