

# Victory at All Costs: Case Studies in US Army Race Relations and African American Propensity to Serve

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Victory at All Costs: Case Studies in US Army Race Relations and African American Propensity to Serve, by MAJ Andre C. Aleong, 43 pages.

Since the founding of the United States, African Americans have participated in every American conflict and at times served at disproportionate rates than other demographics. During the Korean War and All-Volunteer Force (AVF), black enlistments soared. Consequently, the US Army received the crucial “means” to accomplish strategic aims. While numerous historians have chronicled African American service, research tends to overlook the intrinsic factors that influenced their determination to join the US Army. This monograph examines the underlying factors that drove African American recruitment during the Korean War and the AVF periods of 1973 to 1987. Analyzing African American propensity to serve during the Korean War and AVF is essential for two reasons. First, African Americans persistently volunteered despite experiencing inequities. The US Army remained segregated until the 1950s, yet African Americans still demonstrated their willingness to serve. Secondly, during the Korean War and AVF, the strategic environment pressured the US Army to expand in size to fight large-scale ground combat operations. African Americans who served provided the vital means for the US Army to posture for large-scale ground combat. This monograph determined that three motives drove African American enrollments, which included a yearning for improved citizenship, improved economic status, and individualism. Examining African American service against the backdrop of social imbalances provides a useful case study that informs the US Army how it can incentivize disparate groups to enlist. As the future remains ominous, the Army can garner the lessons learned from African American service and apply them when necessary.

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## Abbreviations

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ARI	Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences
AVF	All-Volunteer Force
DRRI	Defense Race Relations Institute
EO	Equal Opportunity
ETO	European Theater of Operations
FECOM	Far East Command
JP	Joint Publication
KATUSA	Korean Augmentation to the United States Army
LSGCO	Large Scale Ground Combat Operations
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
VEAP	Veterans' Education Assistance Program

## Introduction

For an African American, the military is the fairest place to reach goals based on potential. In the military, standards are very clear. If you are good and you've met the standards you will be promoted.

— Lieutenant General Calvin A.H. Waller

Since the founding of the United States, African Americans have participated in every conflict that the United States has fought. The propensity of African Americans to serve is especially worth exploring for two reasons. First, African Americans in the aggregate continued to join in comparatively higher numbers than their white counterparts. This pattern occurred although the US Army remained segregated up until the mid-1950s. Secondly, African Americans enlisted despite recognizing that domestic policies enforced segregation. In fact, US society remained largely segregated until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.<sup>1</sup> President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981 in 1948 lawfully desegregated the US military. However, integration occurred slowly, resulting in the last US Army unit integrating in April of 1954.<sup>2</sup> Despite these predicaments, African Americans volunteered at disproportionate rates compared to the rest of the US population. The Korean War and the advent of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) (1973-1987) encompassed hallmark periods for African American recruitment and retention. During both eras, African Americans enlisted at high rates and consequently provided the critical manpower that the US Army needed to secure national interests. This study seeks to address three fundamental questions. First, why did African American recruitment and retention surge during the Korean War and the early years of the AVF? Secondly, what intrinsic factors influenced

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Hampton, II, *The Black Officer Corps: A History of Black Military Advancement from Integration Through Vietnam* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 262.

African Americans to serve during the aforementioned periods? Finally, how did African American service coalesce with US Army strategic aims?

The annals of American warfare have often embodied episodic periods that required a significant percentage of the population to serve in order to support US national interests. During the Korean War and shortly after the Vietnam War, emerging threats required the Army to expand in size rapidly. While drafting the Truman Doctrine, President Harry Truman aptly described how the strategic environment expanded US commitments globally. He went on to state that “great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.”<sup>3</sup> African Americans who enlisted invariably provided the critical manpower that the US Army needed to accomplish enduring US strategic objectives. Black Americans recognized that their service represented a paradox. Black soldiers acknowledged that their service required them to fight and possibly die for a country where they faced rampant inequality. However, African Americans still viewed the military as an opportunity instead of a hindrance. The impetus for African Americans to enlist spawned from a myriad of factors ranging from citizenship, economic motives, and individualism. Understanding the reasons that drove African American enrollment during the Cold War and early AVF periods will inform current US Army recruiting strategies. Once armed with this information, the US Army can craft recruiting strategies that leverages the US populace in support of strategic aims.

Examining the dynamics that influenced African Americans to serve is crucial to understanding today’s operational environment. The return of great power competition indicates that large-scale ground combat operations (LSGCO) will likely occur in the future. US Army doctrine plainly states that LSGCO will characterize prolonged combat operations, enormous in scale and scope.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the nature of LSGCO demands a speedy increase in troop

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<sup>3</sup> The Truman Doctrine, “Address of the President to Congress, Recommending Assistance to Greece and Turkey,” 12 March 1947, The Truman Doctrine collection, Harry S. Truman Library, 5, accessed 07 February 2021, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/online-collections/truman-doctrine>.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington,

strength and concurrence from the US population to recruit the large quantities of soldiers needed. Garnering support from the US populace to fight a LSGCO conflict could easily become a challenging feat. Open dissent has existed in every conflict that the US Army has fought. However, historical trends in African American service indicate that societal schisms did not significantly deter their desire to volunteer for military service. During the Korean War and the AVF, black Americans comprised a significant recruitment pool that the US Army applied to their advantage. For example, black soldiers represented 12.9 percent of the 600,000 service members that served during the Korean War.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, by 1985 blacks represented 30 percent of the 776,000 soldiers serving in the active-duty Army at that time.<sup>6</sup> The Korean War and AVF Army both provide salient case studies that will elucidate the US Army's understanding of how the populace aids in the accomplishment of military objectives, which subsequently fulfills political aims.

This monograph uses two historical case studies to analyze African American recruitment through the lens of large-scale ground combat operations. LSGCO did not exist as a term in Army doctrine during the Korean War and AVF period. However, the nature of combat operations in the Cold War demanded troop levels that match current doctrinal descriptions of LSGCO. Additionally, research will illustrate how African American recruitment informed the US Army's ability to conduct operational art. Operational art entails integrating the means or the resources "required to accomplish sequence of actions" that support established strategies or campaigns.<sup>7</sup> In short, the research will address how black Americans provided the crucial "means" for the US

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DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Eliot O. Pope Jr., "Forgotten Soldiers from a Forgotten War: Oral History Testimonies of African American Korean War Veterans" (PhD diss, Loyola University, Chicago, 2017), 28; Marianne S. Duckworth, "What Hour of the Night: Black Enlisted Men's Experiences and the Desegregation of the Army During the Korean War, 1950-1" (PhD diss, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 1994), 91.

<sup>6</sup> Charles C. Moskos, "Success Story Blacks in the Army," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1, 1986, 66.

<sup>7</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), II-4.

Army to accomplish its strategic aims during the Korean War and the AVF period of 1973 to 1987.

Since this study will center on African American service in relation to large-scale ground combat operations and operational art, it is crucial to define both terms. Army Doctrinal Publication 3-0 (ADP) defines LSGCO as “sustained combat operations involving multiple corps and divisions.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 describes operational art as “the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means.”<sup>9</sup> As previously mentioned, subsequent passages will explicate how the US Army integrated African Americans as a “means” to achieve strategic objectives.

Finally, given the fact that research will focus on black recruitment during the AVF it is important to outline how the US Army conceived the AVF over time. For the purposes of this research, the AVF refers to the time period and range of activities that the US Army conducted to transition from a conscription force to a volunteer force. Army historians generally acknowledge that the history of the AVF encompassed five periods: 1973-1976, 1976-1980, 1980-1983, 1983-1987, and 1987-1990.<sup>10</sup> Later sections of this study will chronicle African American enrollment trends from the first four periods.

Throughout this study, discourse examines several factors to address the study’s overarching question concerning what factors motivated African Americans to join the US Army during the Korean War and after the advent of the AVF. In sum, this paper argues that three factors provided the intrinsic motivations for African Americans to serve, which included a desire

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<sup>8</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, xii.

<sup>10</sup> David R. Segal and Naomi Verdugo, “Demographic Trends and Personnel Policies as Determinants of the Racial Composition of the Volunteer Army,” *Armed Forces & Society* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 621.

for improved citizenship, economic prosperity, and individualism. Furthermore, this paper draws on scholarship from primary sources and within academia to explicate how African Americans perceived the US Army as an institution that could overturn economic disadvantages, advance their goals of achieving equality in society, and provide a secondary institution that fostered camaraderie and individual autonomy. Additionally, this paper contends that African American recruitment and retention bolstered the US Army's ability to employ operational art successfully. During both historical periods (Korean War and AVF), African Americans provided a significant amount of manpower that enabled the US Army to meet its military objectives and prevented early culmination once the US Army became engaged in conflict.

This study has three limitations. First is the lack of primary sources due to imposed constraints following the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited access to libraries and research institutions. The second limitation concerns the lack of information on the propensity of African American women to serve. Part of the difficulty in acquiring this information stems from the fact that the Army did not integrate women into its force structure until 1978.<sup>11</sup> Before that period, women served under the auspices of a separate branch formerly known as the Women's Army Corps. Lastly, the preponderance of sources available on African American service tends to focus almost exclusively on the Army. Figures tend to omit comprehensive data concerning African American service in the other service branches, most notably the Coast Guard and US Navy.

What follows is a historical examination of African American participation in the late 20th century. An examination of the scholarship provides a basis from which to understand the conversations that scholars have had on this topic. Next, the monograph focuses on the individual aspects that drew African Americans towards the US Army before the Korean War. Moreover, understanding African American proclivity to enlist during the Korean War as the military began to integrate provides salient context concerning how African American service became

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<sup>11</sup> Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 135.

inextricably linked to US strategic aims in the 1950s. This study then traces the origins of the US Army's transition to the AVF and its correlation with African American participation, while also providing insight into US Army race relations and African American enrollment trends during the AVF periods of 1973 to 1987. Finally, the monograph connects the history of African American service to the current force composition, clarifying how African American recruitment trends remain relevant given the US Army's focus on LSGCO today.

## Historiography

Numerous scholars have covered the history of African American service. The scope of historiography on black Americans in the US Army ranges from personal accounts of black veterans, black participation in individual wars, or a comprehensive history of black service from the Revolutionary War to the present. Research on the Korean War tends to outline political and military actions to integrate the US Army. Examining the underlying factors that drove the black community to push for integration exposes the motivators that influenced African Americans to enlist. Researchers that have written on African American service during the AVF period generally use the Vietnam War as a starting point. From there, scholarship discusses how the Vietnam War shaped policy decisions to transition from conscription to the AVF. Evidence from the AVF period provides clarity concerning recruiting techniques that correlated with African American propensity to serve.

Historiography from the Korean War and AVF periods centers on several recurring themes. First, various scholars assert that the desire for blacks to serve spawned from a need to justify their patriotism and subsequently create a path to citizenship. Secondly, historians repeatedly posit that a lack of economic opportunities pulled blacks into the US Army. Third, blacks became drawn to service because they perceived the US Army as a meritocracy that promotes upward mobility and individual autonomy. Lastly, researchers illuminate how black Americans joined the Army during transformative periods in history such as the Civil Rights

Movement and the Cold War. These periods shaped Army policy and elucidated how the Army learned that codifying its racial policies eventually influenced black recruitment, which directly supported strategic aims. The following overview of historiography denotes the various scholars and the relevant analysis they produced that supported this study.

During the first decade of the 21st century, numerous authors, including Kimberly L. Phillips, Gail Buckley, and Isaac Hampton III, wrote historical works that chronicled the historical theme of black military service and citizenship. In 2001 Buckley focused on the theme of military and citizenship in her work *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*. However, Buckley contrasts with later authors because she argues that black service and citizenship corresponded with patriotism. Buckley lists early black heroes such as Crispus Attucks to amplify her point that black Americans served to defend their country and use their service to impart meaningful change. She asserts that black soldiers fought the nation's wars to "better their own lives and make their country true to its own best promise."<sup>12</sup> Lastly, Buckley concludes that blacks gained recognition from US society through their military service. This, in turn, led them to see the tangible benefits that military service provided.

Phillips continues scholarship concerning the relationship between black military service and citizenship in *War! What Is It Good For?* However, Phillips's research diverges from Buckley's assertions that military service coalesced with patriotism. Phillips instead contends that African Americans endeavored to integrate the military and use military service as a platform to advance their citizenship. Phillip's research chronicles black American efforts to integrate the military during the Civil Rights Movement that encompassed the periods from the Post-Civil War Reconstruction era to the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954. During this period, the black community consistently used the Civil Rights Movement as a platform to communicate the

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<sup>12</sup> Buckley, *American Patriots*, xiii.

black populace's intent to integrate the military because they viewed the "right to fight as an expression of full citizenship."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Phillips reasons that once the military became integrated, African Americans gained the confidence to advance individual rights further and thus began to view the military as an organization that cultivates civil rights. Phillips closes by describing that black Americans today still view the US Army as an organization that espouses equity, which influences their recruitment.

Similarly, Isaac Hampton's *The Black Officers Corps*, published in 2013, emphasizes the connection between military service and citizenship. The title of Hampton's study initially appears misleading; however, his research still covers African American service writ large instead of focusing solely on black officers. Hampton differs from his counterparts in the vein that he argues that blacks lobbied to serve in the Army as early as the Civil War. Hampton further elaborates how African Americans and their quest to use the Army as a path to citizenship corresponded with US Army manpower needs. Hampton amplifies his point when he comments that black soldiers wanted to "prove their fighting prowess and secure their place in the country."<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, Hampton explains that although the Army integrated, the organization did not wholly insulate itself from the issue of civil rights. In further passages, Hampton also narrates how the Army righted racial imbalances at the unit level, which improved combat effectiveness. Hampton provides an overview of the various equal opportunity (EO) policies that the US Army adopted throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Hampton offers that the US Army's impulse to improve race relations stemmed from a strategic outlook. In short, the US Army felt that racial tensions would adversely impact combat effectiveness and thus limit the US Army's ability to meet national objectives. Hampton proffers that as the US Army revised its racial policies, black

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<sup>13</sup> Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 166.

<sup>14</sup> Hampton, *The Black Officer Corps*, 187.

Americans saw the US Army as an equal opportunity employer, and became more inclined to enlist.

Unlike Phillips, Hampton, and Buckley, scholars Morris MacGregor, Beth Bailey, and Bernard Rostker instead highlight the themes of African American service in response to a lack of economic opportunities. In 1981, MacGregor examined the correlation between black service and economic opportunity, chronicling African American service from World War II to the start of the Vietnam War. In *Integration of the Armed Forces*, MacGregor submits that black Americans had few economic opportunities in the wake of World War II. MacGregor offers that the executive order that integrated the US Army caused attendant surges in black recruitment and retention as African Americans saw the Army as a source of steady employment. MacGregor also notes that the Army integrated sluggishly after receiving directives to integrate. MacGregor's research answers why black Americans continued to enlist and reenlist and see the Army as a purveyor for steady employment even though units remained segregated. MacGregor also explains how the rise in black recruitment proved fortuitous and beneficial as the conflict in Korea demanded more combat power to replace battlefield losses. Finally, MacGregor argues that the Army benefitted from black recruitment because it helped solidify national objectives by "counteracting communist propaganda," which contended that the United States did not represent a role model for democracy due to its segregationist policies.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 21st century, new scholarship emerged that examined African American service after the integration period (1945-1965) and during the AVF. Bernard Rostker's book *I Want You!: The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* served as part of the growing research on African American service during the AVF. Rostker offers a unique perspective concerning black recruitment during the AVF. He served as the Director of the Selective Service in 1979, and the

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<sup>15</sup> Morris MacGregor Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces: 1940-1965* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981), 453.

virtue of his position granted him opportunities to see the various policy decisions that intended to make the AVF a viable alternative for national defense.<sup>16</sup> Rostker's research emphasizes how black enlistment rates continued to climb in the early years of the AVF as black males became attracted to the prospects of increased pay and steady employment. Rostker also asserts that increased recruitment led to growing concerns that the Army may become too black, and it would thus lead to decreased recruitment across other demographics. Furthermore, he describes how senior leaders feared that a large black population in the US Army would cause other nations to interpret that the US government exploits its black population to meet strategic objectives. Rostker's book provides a comprehensive account of the societal and economic factors that influenced black recruitment during the AVF.

Historian Beth Bailey provides a new perspective on African American propensity to serve and the economy, centering her research on both the Vietnam War and AVF period, rather than treating the two timeframes as distinct. Bailey's *America's Army* describes how the Vietnam War created a contentious relationship between the US populace and the US Army. Nevertheless, African Americans continued to enlist at surprisingly high rates. African Americans primarily entered the service because they recognized the pay benefits that military service provided to disadvantaged young black males. Additionally, black males saw Army service as a way to escape the drudgeries of racism in the American workforce. Bailey illustrates how the allure of steady pay continued to manifest after the Vietnam War. As the Army transitioned to the AVF and started to brand itself, Army advertisements attempted to illustrate that the AVF Army would offer pay scales comparable to the civilian sector. These advertisements appealed to black youths that became more concerned with a decent pay salary than young white men.<sup>17</sup>

Sociologists Charles Moskos and John Sibley Butler both provide detailed explanations

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard Rostker, *I Want You!: The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), V.

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 79.

of why individualism motivated black citizens to enlist. Throughout the AVF, Charles Moskos served as one of the most preeminent sociologists that explored the impacts of the AVF on US society. In *All That We Can Be*, Moskos and Butler establish that African Americans viewed the Army as a meritocracy that values members solely on their performance. Furthermore, they stress that from the African American community's perspective, the US Army offered significantly more management positions than the civilian sector. They conclude that the US Army had a broad and unmatched record in promoting black achievement.<sup>18</sup> They also boldly describe the Army as the "only place in American life where whites are routinely bossed around by blacks."<sup>19</sup>

In closing, this sample of the historiography on African American military service indicates that black Americans entered the service to help facilitate goals of better citizenship, to improve their economic plight, and to join an organization that would enable them to meet their individual goals. Furthermore, African American service frequently coincided with transformative periods in America's history. Scholars illustrate how military policies and strategic aims created unforeseen opportunities for black Americans, which incentivized them to enlist.

## An Overview of African American Service Prior to Korea

### The Civil War

African Americans have participated in every war since America's inception. However, most scholars argue that the Civil War established the social precedents that bolstered successive generations of African Americans to join the US Army. When Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, the presidential decree immediately resonated with free black Americans and escaped slaves. Leading figures in the black community such as Frederick Douglass, recognized that the Civil War provided an opportunity to advance the rights of black

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<sup>18</sup> Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (Cambridge, MA: The Twentieth Century Fund Book, 1996), 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Americans. Douglass urged black Americans to enlist, commenting that the “arm of a slave was the best defense against the arm of a slaveholder.”<sup>20</sup> Black Americans clamored to enlist to demonstrate their resolve to share the burden of fighting a war to end slavery and gain recognition as citizens of the United States. On March 3, 1863, Congress signed the Enrollment Act, allowing blacks to enlist.<sup>21</sup> Approximately 186,000 blacks would eventually serve in the US Army during the Civil War.<sup>22</sup> Large pools of black enlistees provided a valuable strategic asset for the US Army. Black soldiers helped offset battlefield casualties, and for the first time, the US Army saw blacks as a means to augment the Army’s size when the strategic environment warranted it.

## The Frontier and Spanish American War

The end of the Civil War ushered in a new wave of black soldiers. Soldiers that served on the frontier and in the Spanish American War became drawn to the military because of the promise of steady pay and guaranteed billeting. Following the Civil War, the US Army rapidly downsized. By 1869 the total troop strength of black soldiers shrank to two infantry regiments (the 24th and 25th) and two cavalry regiments (9th and 10th).<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, black soldiers still desired to enlist in the US Army. Free blacks and returning Civil War veterans sought out the military after discovering limited job prospects. During the Indian Wars of 1867-1890, black soldiers represented one out of every five soldiers serving in the west.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, 3,398 black regular army soldiers, plus an additional 10,000 black volunteers, served during the Spanish

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998), 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> James Griffith, “Minority Participation in The US All-Volunteer Force: Implications for the Civilian-Military Gap and Military Effectiveness,” *European Journal of Military Studies* 7, no. 4 (July 2017): 3.

<sup>23</sup> William T. Bowers, William M. Hammong, and George L MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1996), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Buckley, *American Patriots*, 111.

American War.<sup>25</sup> The US Army obliged blacks that wanted to serve for two reasons. First, the US Army struggled to attract potential recruits after the Civil War because the American public had grown war weary. The ensuing effects of post-war downsizing coupled with economic booms caused a sizeable number of white males to become disinterested in military service. Conversely, a post-war United States deprived economic opportunities for blacks as segregation heightened. Consequently, the propensity of black males to volunteer for Army service increased. Lastly, emerging exigencies pressured the Army to expand to accomplish national objectives, which continually renewed interest in black recruitment.

## World War I

The US Army's involvement in World War I reignited goals of using the US Army as a path to citizenship. In the years preceding World War I, two civil rights advocates, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, emerged whose views on citizenship would ultimately influence African American enlistments. Washington viewed citizenship as a process where African Americans gradually moved their way up the social rung through "character, prudence, and hard work."<sup>26</sup> Blacks enlisting in World War I who supported Washington's views did so with the understanding that service entailed one of many paths along the journey to better citizenship. However, Du Bois disagreed, arguing that black Americans should demand rights immediately. Furthermore, he saw the military as a platform to promote individual autonomy and "develop new leaders for the future."<sup>27</sup> Soldiers who followed Du Bois's circle enlisted to achieve self-reliance, expand their citizenship, and build the requisite skills that would enable them to become prominent leaders in the Civil Rights Movement.

From the US Army's perspective, senior leaders felt compelled to accept blacks in their

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<sup>25</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 6, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Hampton, *The Black Officer Corps*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

ranks to ensure military objectives aligned with political aims. America justified its entrance in World War I as part of a collaborative effort to “make the world safe for democracy.”<sup>28</sup> This, in turn, required the Army to make sure its ranks reflected US society. Moreover, much like previous conflicts, the US Army accepted blacks into their ranks because they needed the manpower immediately. The Selective Service Act of 1917 explicitly mandated that all eligible males between the ages of twenty-one to thirty-one register for conscription.<sup>29</sup> World War I also marked one of the first instances where the Army codified racial policies. World War I policies directed that blacks serve in segregated units, set a limit on the number of black soldiers that the Army could induct, and finally ensured that black soldiers remained relegated to labor units.<sup>30</sup> Despite these setbacks, 140,000 black soldiers served overseas, with 40,000 of them seeing combat.<sup>31</sup> As black veterans returned from World War I, they somewhat gained the individual autonomy they desired. However, they also returned disillusioned because of the emotional damage that segregation exacted on their morale.

## World War II

Much like World War I, the views of prominent civil rights advocates would influence black Americans to serve. Black leaders such as A. Philip Randolph galvanized African Americans to enlist by promoting the Double V Campaign. The Double V Campaign aptly called for black Americans to enlist to achieve “victory against fascism in Europe and racism at home.”<sup>32</sup> In the simplest of terms, blacks who enlisted felt that they could relate to oppressed peoples suffering from the scourge of Nazism. Also, African Americans felt that by helping the

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<sup>28</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Buckley, *American Patriots*, 165.

<sup>30</sup> Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> US Department of Defense, *Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation* (Washington, DC: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 52.

<sup>32</sup> Jeremy P. Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat: How African Americans Found Equality in Korea and Vietnam* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 153.

military eliminate Nazism, they could influence American citizens and garner support for the black freedom struggle. World War II also showcased the impact of black media on Army recruitment. Beginning in 1917, millions of black Americans moved toward cities as part of the Great Migration. The Great Migration continued into the 1920s and 1930s, and eventually enabled large enclaves of black Americans to join the American proletariat.<sup>33</sup> By 1940, the rise of the black proletariat coincided with an increase in the black community's literacy rate, which contemporaneously boosted the number of black subscribers for black newspapers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Throughout the war, black newspapers played a pivotal role in advertising Army recruitment and attracted thousands of young males to enlist. By the war's end, the combined efforts of the black media and civil rights leaders facilitated the recruitment of 701,678 black enlistees.<sup>34</sup> This represented a dramatic increase from the meager 5,000 blacks that served in the Army in 1940.<sup>35</sup>

World War II also marshaled in a new class of black recruits. The impact of the mass migration led to more affluent and racially conscious recruits. As the war progressed, individualism began to supplant citizenship as a motivator for service. Black Americans began to appeal for integration in the Army, striving to dispel stereotypes of racial inferiority. Blacks frequently volunteered for combat postings, endeavoring to use combat as a platform to refute charges of incompetency and cowardice.<sup>36</sup> On the rare occasions that commanders asked for volunteers to conduct combat missions, black Americans volunteered with the utmost alacrity.

The most notable instance where black soldiers volunteered for combat occurred during the closing months of World War II in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Battlefield

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<sup>33</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 125.

<sup>34</sup> Buckley, *American Patriots*, 280.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 262

<sup>36</sup> Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 6.

casualties from the Battle of the Bulge resulted in a combat shortage of 29,000 infantryman.<sup>37</sup> The ETO command requested volunteers from support units to train as infantryman and replace combat losses. 2,500 black soldiers heedlessly answered the call for volunteers, citing racial pride as a motivation.<sup>38</sup> After the war, the ETO conducted surveys to assess how white officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO) felt about serving alongside black soldiers. Data from respondents concluded that 77 percent of officers and NCOs expressed favorable attitudes about serving with blacks, and over 80 percent felt that black soldiers performed exemplary in combat.<sup>39</sup> The positive feedback that blacks gained from whites in combat emboldened their desire to serve. This pattern would continue after World War II.

Also, during World War II, the US Army initially sought to continue its racial policies from World War I. Units remained segregated, and the Army imposed a racial quota that limited black representation to 10 percent of the Army's total strength.<sup>40</sup> However, the majority of the black population opposed the Army's race policies. At the onset of World War II, black leaders used political pressure to coerce the US Army to extend opportunities to black soldiers in exchange for their promise to galvanize the black populace to support the war effort. Leaders such as A. Philip Randolph echoed the sentiments of black citizens and "placed a price on black support for the war effort."<sup>41</sup> In 1941 Randolph attempted to pressure President Franklin Roosevelt to integrate the military by threatening to incite the black community to march on

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<sup>37</sup> Richard T. Cranford, "The Impact of Racial Integration on the Combat Effectiveness of Eighth (US) Army during the Korean War" (Masters Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 2011), 57.

<sup>38</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, "Opinions about Negro Infantry Platoons in White Companies of 7 Divisions," 3 July 1945, Desegregation of the Armed Forces collection, Harry S. Truman Library, 2-3, accessed 23 November 2020, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/opinions-about-negro-infantry-platoons-white-companies-7-divisions>.

<sup>40</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Washington and resist draft calls.<sup>42</sup>

Randolph failed in his quest to integrate the military, but his efforts did achieve a few small victories. For example, Randolph's efforts encourage President Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, which prohibited discrimination in the defense industry and provided thousands of defense jobs to black citizens.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, on January 16, 1941, the Army admitted black applicants as pilots in the Army Air Corps, and on July 8, 1944, the War Department desegregated post exchanges and theaters.<sup>44</sup> Small victories such as these served two purposes. First, they helped propagate the theme that the US Army offered more opportunities than civil society and eventually influenced black recruitment. Second, they established the foundation for future civil rights strategies that would ultimately pressure the United States to desegregate the military.

## Post-World War II and Integration

In the aftermath of World War II, the US Army began to explore the feasibility of integrating the force. The Army's motives to consider integration stemmed from the positive feedback they received from postwar surveys, which collected data on white soldier's perceptions of African Americans in combat. Additionally, the US Army found itself struggling to counteract Soviet propaganda, which repeatedly reported "instances of persecution and oppression" against black Americans.<sup>45</sup> On October 1, 1945, Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy directed the Army to conduct a thorough review and revision of policies with respect to race.<sup>46</sup> In response to McCloy's guidance, the US Army convened a board led by Lieutenant General Alvan C. Gillem

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<sup>42</sup> Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 45, 28.

<sup>45</sup> United States Army General Staff, Military Intelligence Division, "Soviet Memorandum for The Use of Propaganda Officers of the Armed Forces in the Armed Forces of the Bourgeoisie Nations: The Status of the Negro in the United States Army," 1951, 5.

<sup>46</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 153.

Jr. to investigate current policies concerning the employment of black soldiers.<sup>47</sup> The “Gillem Board” finished its investigation on November 17, 1945, and produced the following assessments.<sup>48</sup> First, the board recognized the solid performance of black soldiers in combat alongside whites during World War II. Second, the board agreed that segregation adversely impacted the “efficiency and morale of black soldiers in combat units.”<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the board agreed that relegating black soldiers to support units proved uneconomical. The board asserted that the Army should employ every effort “to utilize efficiently every qualified individual.”<sup>50</sup> Third, the board’s findings stopped just short of recommending integration. Instead, the board concluded that the Army should afford black soldiers maximum opportunities to serve in any occupation within black units and overhead installation units. Lastly, the board recommended that the Army conduct experimental groupings of black soldiers into white units.

The Gillem Board’s findings did not sit well with the black community. African Americans appreciated the fact that the board acknowledged how counterproductive it was to maintain a segregated Army. However, blacks dissented with the idea of conducting experimental trials with integration and instead argued that the time had come for complete integration. Civil rights advocates continued their campaign to integrate the military with renewed vigor. Much of their feelings echoed the sentiments of black Americans writ large. Following World War II returning black veterans followed their civilian counterparts and moved to the cities ushering in a second era of mass migration. The expansion of black populations in American cities increased the level of support for civil rights objectives. Furthermore, black participation in World War II

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>48</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 155.

<sup>49</sup> The President’s Committee, “Freedom to Serve, Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in The Armed Services, A Report by The President's Committee,” 22 May 1950, Desegregation of the Armed Forces collection, Harry S. Truman Library, XI, accessed 23 November, 2020, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/freedom-to-serve#XI>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 53.

had engendered more confidence in the black populace as they saw equality as a real possibility. Seizing on this momentum, civil rights advocates led by A. Philip Randolph pressured elected officials to pass legislation that would integrate the military. As in 1941, Randolph once again threatened to use civil disobedience and his influence to encourage blacks to abstain from supporting conscription.<sup>51</sup>

The assertiveness of the black community began to gain traction with President Harry Truman. By 1948 the Truman administration recognized that integration of the armed forces could quickly become an election issue. Consequently, President Truman felt compelled to sign Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, as part of his initiative to “unite the nation’s minorities behind his 1948 candidacy.”<sup>52</sup> President Truman also took additional measures to ensure that integration occurred seamlessly. Truman established the Presidential Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, or the Fahy Committee, to examine race policy in the military and carry out the policy of Executive Order 9981.<sup>53</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement, coupled with integration, had significant implications regarding future Army policies towards race. The US Army recognized the influence that civil rights leaders had on potential recruits. Additionally, Army leaders realized how quickly a domestic issue could manifest into a military issue. Once integrated, black recruitment immediately began to surge as African Americans saw increased opportunities in the integrated Army.

## Black Recruitment and Retention During the Korean War

### Motivator to Serve: Citizenship

On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and subsequently

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<sup>51</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 616.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 616.

<sup>53</sup> The President’s Committee, “Freedom to Serve, Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in The Armed Services, A Report by The President’s Committee,” 22 May 1950, XI.

invaded South Korea after consistent conflict between the divided peninsula since 1945.<sup>54</sup> The actions of North Korea precipitated a global crisis that drew the United States into another conflict. Historians often characterize the Korean War as the first integrated war in American history. In reality, the Secretary of Defense officially announced the completion of integration after the Korean War ended in 1954.<sup>55</sup> Still, thousands of black soldiers enlisted and reenlisted prior to the conflict. The post-World War II Army saw African American recruitment rates increase from 10.4 to 16 percent.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, African Americans now represented two-thirds of the Army's force.<sup>57</sup> Once again, citizenship fell into the category of motivators that drew blacks toward the Army. However, African American perceptions of military service and citizenship during the Korean War slightly detracted from previously held beliefs. For one, black Americans felt beholden to the Truman administration after it passed legislation to desegregate the military. Second, African Americans also viewed communism as an existential threat. Growing numbers of African Americans began to feel that if communism spread to the United States, it would impede civil rights efforts to make the US society more progressive.

African American sentiments concerning moral obligations to serve began to gain momentum following President Truman's executive decisions to implement Executive Order 9981 and appoint the Fahy Committee. African Americans especially viewed the Fahy Committee as unprecedented because it established provisions to ensure the military executed the President's directive. With the stroke of a pen, Truman enunciated the US government's intention to ensure "equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's

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<sup>54</sup> George Cooper, "African Americans in the Korean War: Forgotten Warriors of the Forgotten War," paper presented at the Korean War Conference: Commemorating the 60th Anniversary, Victoria, TX, June 24-26, 2010, 1.

<sup>55</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 473.

<sup>56</sup> Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 117.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

defense.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Truman also appointed an executive committee to enforce the policy of his order. As one of its first acts, the Fahy Committee eliminated the Army policy of imposing racial quotas on black enlistments. By April 1950, the US Army effectively removed racial quotas in recruiting policies.<sup>59</sup>

The Fahy Committee’s actions produced an immediate impact as black enlistments increased from 8.2 to 12.9 percent in August 1950, and reenlistment increased from 8.5 to 12.9 percent.<sup>60</sup> African Americans who joined during this period volunteered to show their gratitude for a presidential administration that labored to secure more rights for them. Mounting numbers of African Americans enlisted because they felt the “need to uphold their end of the bargain in Korea and prove themselves on the battlefield without fomenting problems related to the civil rights struggle.”<sup>61</sup> Additionally, African Americans sought to prove their patriotism, thereby increasing President Truman’s political influence and his ability to pass more civil rights legislation. A significant portion of the black community felt that President Truman embodied their best chance to advance citizenship rights. This, in turn, incentivized young black males to enlist because they “did not want to give ammunition to his critics by failing to respond positively.”<sup>62</sup>

Communism served as another factor that bolstered African Americans to enlist under the banner of citizenship. African American soldiers accepted that their service represented an oddity, particularly because they chose military service even though US society remained largely

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<sup>58</sup> The President’s Committee, “Freedom to Serve, Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in The Armed Services, A Report by The President’s Committee,” 22 May 1950, VIII.

<sup>59</sup> The President’s Committee, “Freedom to Serve, Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in The Armed Services, A Report by The President’s Committee,” 22 May 1950, V.

<sup>60</sup> Duckworth, “What Hour of the Night: Black Enlisted Men’s Experiences and the Desegregation of the Army During the Korean War, 1950-1,” 90.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell Lerner, “Is it For This We Fought and Bled?: The Korean War and the Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Journal of Military History* 20, no. 2 (April 2018): 522.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

segregated. At the same time African Americans saw value in their nation, especially since Truman had commenced a series of legislation that aimed to generate more rights for African Americans. Additionally, it is important to note that black veterans of the Korean War were products of their time. Segments of the black population concurred with political rhetoric that denoted communism as an existential threat to American democracy. Black news syndicates such as the *Call and Post* reasoned that the United States “stood head and shoulders above any other nation including Russia in morality.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* influenced black recruitment by covering the combat exploits of the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment in the opening months of the Korean War. The *Chicago Defender* characterized the 24th as “playing leading roles in American participation in the clash.”<sup>64</sup> In light of these views defeating communism became integral to preserving American democracy, and African Americans felt that the American system of governance was the best chance they had to advance their civil rights.

### Motivator to Serve: Economic

While some black veterans recalled citizenship as a significant driver for enlistment, other veterans would cite poverty as the principal factor that drove them to enlist. Black veterans that came of age during the Korean War also shared recollections of the Great Depression. During the Great Depression, African Americans in cities like Pittsburgh continually suffered, resulting in a homeless rate of 40 percent.<sup>65</sup> The Great Depression created a yearning for African Americans to improve their status and distance themselves from their somber memories of living a destitute lifestyle.

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<sup>63</sup> Mitchell Lerner, “Is it For This We Fought and Bled?: The Korean War and the Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Journal of Military History* 20, no. 2 (April 2018): 521.

<sup>64</sup> Mark Slagle, “Mightier Than the Sword? The Black Press and the End of Racial Segregation in the U.S. Military, 1948-1954” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2010), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Pope Jr., “Forgotten Soldiers from a Forgotten War,” 38.

In addition to childhood experiences, rampant unemployment also played a vital role in attracting black males to enlist. After World War II, America experienced an economic boom. However, most African Americans received an inequitable share of the wealth or economic prosperity that accompanied victory in World War II. Cities such as Detroit and Chicago began a process of rapid deindustrialization, which reduced the pool of available jobs.<sup>66</sup> Black unemployment became even more pronounced in southern communities where job markets like the lumber industry began to lay off black employees.<sup>67</sup> The Fahy Committee's decision to eliminate recruiting quotas on September 30, 1949, became both fortuitous and conducive for military aged black males who struggled to find an organization that offered steady employment as well as opportunities for career advancement.<sup>68</sup> African Americans sought out Army service in an attempt to capitalize on the "economic incentives offered by the military."<sup>69</sup> As the war progressed, the need for more soldiers increased commensurately with black recruitment. African Americans began to gradually see how the Army offered opportunities to ascend to a higher social class.

### Motivator to Serve: Individualism

As mentioned earlier, ideals of individualism had often spurred African Americans to enlist during conflicts that preceded the Korean War. The Korean War reaffirmed that African Americans still valued their individualism and saw the US Army as an organization that provided opportunities that could later facilitate individual growth. The GI Bill offered one of the most compelling reasons for African Americans to enlist. In the decades leading up to the Korean War, thousands of African Americans craved educational opportunities that would move them towards

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<sup>66</sup> Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 116.

<sup>67</sup> Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 116.

<sup>68</sup> The President's Committee, "Freedom to Serve, Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in The Armed Services, A Report by The President's Committee," 22 May 1950, 45.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

the upper echelons of America's social stratum. As early as 1940, blacks represented a staggering 2 percent of doctors in America.<sup>70</sup> Sobering statistics such as this led many African Americans to believe that acquiring a professional degree was virtually impossible. Integration changed that perception. In short, the idea of "receiving a free education made joining the US military an attractive option"<sup>71</sup> for thousands of young African Americans. During the Korean War, African Americans perceived military service as advantageous because it created paths towards economic prosperity.

Another benefit that lured African Americans to serve was the various internal educational programs that the Army offered to soldiers. In the wake of World War II, Army studies concluded that most black enlisted soldiers possessed an education below the level of fifth grade.<sup>72</sup> African Americans who fell in this category typically received their education in the south, where African Americans continually received limited educational opportunities. Low education rates concerned commanders as they realized it would become increasingly challenging to promote black soldiers or send them to advanced military schooling. Commanders within Far East Command (FECOM) and European Command began to establish educational programs and ordered soldiers lacking an education level above fifth grade to attend.<sup>73</sup> In European Command, 60 percent of black soldiers within the command attended the program.<sup>74</sup> Educational programs had an enduring positive effect on black soldiers as they felt the Army had given them quality education for the first time in their lives. Accordingly, reenlistments swelled to a rate of 12.9 percent by March 1950.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pope Jr., "Forgotten Soldiers from a Forgotten War," 40.

<sup>71</sup> Pope Jr., "Forgotten Soldiers from a Forgotten War," 41.

<sup>72</sup> Bowers, *Black Soldier, White Army*, 45.

<sup>73</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 216.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

The last factors that swayed African Americans enlistment included a desire to assert their adulthood and racial pride. Like their predecessors in World War I, African Americans still viewed the Army as an organization that builds individual autonomy. African Americans enlisted because they wanted to join an organization that instills “confidence and competence.”<sup>76</sup> African Americans also hoped that the Army would provide a venue for them to disprove stereotypes of the black race. For decades African Americans had endured racist propaganda as media outlets continued to portray them as inferior, “uncivilized and barbaric.”<sup>77</sup> When the Korean War started, blacks clamored for combat so that they could prove themselves as equals. As the war evolved, American media began to capture the actions of black soldiers in combat and depict African Americans more positively. Newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* reported on the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment exploits during their first action at Yechon. The newspaper lauded the unit, saying that it had earned battle honors.<sup>78</sup>

Refuting disparaging myths about the black race engendered significant racial pride amongst black enlistees. African Americans also viewed recognition and inclusion amongst their white comrades as equally important. Large numbers of African Americans volunteered for combat to convince their white comrades that they belonged in the service. In the early months of the Korean War, 30 percent of all black soldiers had volunteered to serve in combat units.<sup>79</sup> As African Americans began to gain respect, the US Army steadily devolved into a more inclusive culture, which also shaped African Americans’ decisions to continue serving. The findings of an Army investigation known as Project CLEAR amplified widely held beliefs from African Americans that their service enabled them to gain rapport with their white comrades. Project

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<sup>76</sup> Duckworth, “What Hour of the Night: Black Enlisted Men’s Experiences and the Desegregation of the Army During the Korean War, 1950-1,” 200.

<sup>77</sup> Pope Jr., “Forgotten Soldiers from a Forgotten War,” 37.

<sup>78</sup> Lerner, “Is it For This We Fought and Bled?,” 526.

<sup>79</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 431.

CLEAR, also known as “The Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army,” was a study conducted by the Army in February 1951 to assess if integration had improved combat effectiveness.<sup>80</sup> The study determined that “racial segregation limits the effectiveness of the Army while integrations enhanced efficiencies.”<sup>81</sup> Project CLEAR solidified that the Army could integrate and still meet its military objectives. Furthermore, it paved the way for more black soldiers to enter the Army as they felt it had become more inclusive.

## African Americans and Strategic Aims During the Korean War

Throughout the Korean War, the Truman Doctrine influenced nearly every strategic decision that the US Army made. President Truman crafted this policy after a session he had with Congress on March 12, 1947.<sup>82</sup> The Truman Doctrine articulated that the United States intended to contain the spread of communism by providing military support in the event that any democratic nation becomes threatened by an actor or force. The US Army interpreted the Truman Doctrine as a directive to reverse post World War II downsizing. The US Army began to reinvest heavily in recruiting as leaders envisioned the next war as one involving large-scale conflict that would involve multiple divisions and corps.<sup>83</sup> In the years leading up to the Korean War, African Americans provided the vital means for the US Army to maintain a state of readiness and meet the demands of the Truman Doctrine. In 1947, alone, 140,000 African Americans enlisted in the Army.<sup>84</sup>

Once the war started, the demand signal for African Americans continued to increase. By May 1951, Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgway, commander of FECOM, requested that the

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<sup>80</sup> Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat*, 9, 81.

<sup>81</sup> Alfred H. Hausrath, *Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army: A 1951 Study* (McLean, VA: Research Analysis Corporation, The Operations Research Office of The John Hopkins University, 1967), S-5.

<sup>82</sup> Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat*, 53.

<sup>83</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 1-2.

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 117.

Army grant him approval to desegregate the theater. Ridgway felt that integration was necessary to replace battlefield losses. He also argued that assigning black soldiers to all-black units was inefficient since it deprived combat units of valuable manpower. For example, by April 1951, Ridgway had noted that most black units had reported themselves as 60 percent overstrength.<sup>85</sup> Ridgway received approval and instantly integrated his command. The ease with which FECOM integrated proved that integration was a viable military option and that black soldiers represented the Army's new force multiplier.

African Americans also facilitated the accomplishment of US Army strategic aims by providing the Army with political messaging to counter communist propaganda. Throughout the Korean War, the Soviet Union used every opportunity to message America's racial problems and discredit American foreign policy.<sup>86</sup> Integrating the military allowed the Army to regain parity against Soviet adversaries in the information realm. Furthermore, African Americans in the Army also supported strategic objectives by fostering cohesion amongst allies and partners. Throughout the Korean War, the US Army shared battlespace with foreign armies. Some nations allowed their armies to integrate with American units as part of the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA).<sup>87</sup> Integrating African Americans into combat units convinced allied forces from countries such as Ethiopia and Colombia that the US Army had become more inclusive.<sup>88</sup> As the Army continued to fight the Cold War in the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans continued to provide the strategic messaging the army needed to legitimize its strategic aims.

## Black Recruitment and Retention During the AVF

### Origins of the AVF

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<sup>85</sup> MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 431.

<sup>86</sup> Lerner, "Is it For This We Fought and Bled?," 523.

<sup>87</sup> Cranford, "The Impact of Racial Integration on the Combat Effectiveness of Eighth (US) Army during the Korean War," 70.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

In December 1972, the Army closed a chapter in its storied history when it drafted its last citizen, Dwight Elliot Stone.<sup>89</sup> The evolution of the US Army's all-volunteer army did not occur in isolation. Multiple political and social events combined to shape the US government's decision to bring back a volunteer-based military. These events included the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, an American public that began to view military service as a choice and not an obligation, and finally, an Army seeking to induct quality recruits. Exploring these dynamics provides relevant historical context that helps explicate why African Americans chose to enlist following the dawn of the AVF. The next few passages will discuss the origins of the AVF and how the Army's transition to an AVF force later impacted African American recruitment.

Shortly after the Tet Offensive, popular support for the Vietnam War began to wane rapidly. By 1968, the death toll had reached 35,000, which further amplified divisiveness in America.<sup>90</sup> African Americans especially resented the Vietnam conflict as they felt the burden of the war fell heaviest on them.<sup>91</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. captured the emotions of the black community when he commented that the war exploited "black young men who had been crippled by society."<sup>92</sup> Presidential candidate Richard Nixon sensed that America's predicament provided a political opportunity. During a campaign speech, he pledged to abolish the draft if elected. Nixon summed up the sentiments of the American public when he declared the draft as an infringement on the liberty of the American people.<sup>93</sup> Nixon's strategy succeeded, resulting in him winning the presidential election.

On February 20, 1970, Nixon began fulfilling his campaign promise by appointing a

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<sup>89</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam, A Time to Break Silence," 04 April 1967, King Papers, The Martin Luther King Jr., Research and Education Institute, accessed 14 March 2021, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>.

<sup>93</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 2.

commission to investigate the viability of a volunteer force.<sup>94</sup> The presidential commission known as the “Gates Commission” determined that an AVF was possible if the Army offered both pay benefits and transferrable skills that competed with the private sector. The Gates Commission also made assessments that later influenced recruiting policies in the early years of the AVF. The commission forecasted that recruitment incentives would attract larger numbers of African Americans seeking to escape poverty. Consequently, the commission expressed concern that if a war broke out, the burden of service would fall overwhelmingly on the black population.<sup>95</sup>

The Gates Commission also explored the idea of individual liberty, which would serve as a prominent factor that induced the Army to shift from conscription to the AVF. Citizens expressed frustration with conscription throughout multiple conflicts starting with the Civil War. Americans questioned if the federal government had the lawful right to draft citizens and if the draft stated purpose of safeguarding the nation outweighed its threat to individual liberty.<sup>96</sup> Tensions from the American public during the Vietnam War further underscored arguments that the draft violated individual rights. The Gates Commission summarized public disapproval of the draft through their theory of the hidden tax. Broadly speaking, the Gates Commission determined that the draft imposed superficial burdens on citizens by depriving them of opportunities such as education or higher-paying jobs.<sup>97</sup> In contrast, African Americans tended to view military service differently, recognizing the military offered them access to better opportunities after leaving the military via GI Bill benefits. Black draftees did voice dissent with the draft. Still, African Americans continued to represent 20 percent of all first-time enlistees throughout the Vietnam

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<sup>94</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 77.

<sup>96</sup> Bailey, *America’s Army*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

War.<sup>98</sup> These figures indicate that African Americans saw more opportunities in the military than the rest of US society.

The dilemma of low-quality recruits was the last factor that drove the Army to establish the AVF. As American involvement grew in Vietnam, the Department of Defense (DOD) began to explore methods to induct more men into the service. Further complicating the matter was the glaring fact that as early as 1962, a third of all American males became ineligible for the draft because they scored in the lowest mental categories.<sup>99</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara responded to the draft crisis by implementing a policy known as Project 100,000 in 1966. Project 100,000 became an ambitious program to lower test standards so the military could raise their accessions rate to 100,000 recruits a year.<sup>100</sup> McNamara proclaimed that Project 100,000 would produce a tradeoff by filling critical manpower shortages while simultaneously offering employment opportunities for the underprivileged in exchange for military service. The project had a particularly pronounced effect on African Americans of whom represented 38 percent of their inductees.<sup>101</sup>

A significant population of Project 100,000 participants served honorably during the Vietnam War. However, Army leaders would later express their misgivings with the concept by citing that draftees from the policy hindered combat effectiveness. The Army found Project 100,000 recruits on average harder to train and manage.<sup>102</sup> Once the Vietnam War ended, the Army resolved to divest itself of low-quality recruits. However, Project 100,000 had far-reaching implications in the sense that it fostered high retention from its candidates and presented the military as an attractive prospect for Americans living at or below the poverty line. In the early

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<sup>98</sup> Alan L. Gropman, "Blacks in the Military: The Equal Opportunity Imperative," *The National Interest*, no. 48 (Summer 1997): 77.

<sup>99</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 94.

<sup>100</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 136.

<sup>101</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 95.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

years of the AVF, the Army would face multiple quandaries as it tried to juxtapose resourcing manpower requirements while simultaneously ensuring the Army filled its ranks with quality recruits.

### Motivator to Serve: Economic

On June 30, 1973, the US Army officially ended its policy of conscription and fully transitioned into the AVF. From the onset of the AVF, the Army implemented multiple strategies to brand itself. African Americans readily gravitated toward Army recruitment pitches because economic factors convinced them that the Army offered the best opportunity to escape poverty. In the early years of the AVF (1973-1976), African American recruitment spiked as African Americans sought to circumvent the societal factors that led to economic downturns within black communities.

As America exited the Vietnam conflict, Americans struggled to cope with the economic misfortunes that the war produced. Following the Vietnam War, the socio-economic landscape in America encompassed rife inflation and unemployment. Black communities especially felt the effects of the Vietnam War. Secretary of the Army Clifford Alexander later commented that unemployment rates amongst black youths rose as high as 40 percent by 1977.<sup>103</sup> Increased numbers of black youths began to flock to the Army, seeing it as one of the few employers that offered tangible benefits such as decent pay, travel, and equal opportunities for upward mobility through promotions.<sup>104</sup> However, the allure of enlistment bonuses had a particularly resounding effect on black recruitment. In the early years of the AVF, the Army secured congressional funding for enlistment bonuses to help market the nascent AVF. In May 1973, Army recruitment commercials began promoting a \$2,500 enlistment bonus for applicants who possessed a high

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<sup>103</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 118.

<sup>104</sup> US Department of Defense, *Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation*, 88.

school diploma and opted to enlist in combat arms.<sup>105</sup> Enlistment bonuses achieved instant results as enlistments climbed to a point where African Americans comprised 27 percent of the total Army force by 1976.<sup>106</sup>

The Army also took particular care to include minorities in advertisements during the early years of the AVF. As early as 1971, Army advertisements often included young black men and women.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the Army routinely placed such advertisements in black magazines such as *Essence* and *Ebony*.<sup>108</sup> The Army's approach to advertisement ultimately won over large numbers of black youths by convincing them that the Army was an equal opportunity employer that offered competitive pay.

### Motivator to Serve: Individualism and Educational Opportunities

As the Army entered the 1980s, African American recruitment began to spike again. However, much like the periods of 1973 to 1977, recruitment did not occur in isolation. A series of social dynamics once again provided the catalyst that propelled black Americans to join. By 1974 increases in African American recruitment began to alarm senior leaders. Black recruitment had now escalated to figures that represented them as 30 percent of new recruits entering the Army.<sup>109</sup> Amid the growing tensions, prominent sociologists such as Charles Moskos and Morris Janowitz began pitching a new theory colloquially known as the "tipping point," meaning that African American recruitment would reach a point so high that whites would no longer want to enter the service.<sup>110</sup> Throughout the 1970s, the notion of a "too black" Army began to become pervasive. Fortunately, a considerable number of Army senior leaders recognized the tipping

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<sup>105</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 214.

<sup>106</sup> US Department of Defense, *Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation*, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 78.

<sup>108</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 79.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>110</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 214.

point theory as a guise for covert racism and instead argued that the Army should change its recruiting strategy. Army leaders asserted that procuring funding to bring back the Montgomery GI Bill would draw in a class of recruits from the upper stratum of society. In turn, the Army would acquire recruits that joined for the prospects of enduring skills instead of a dedicated pay salary.

On October 1, 1976, Congress removed funding for the Montgomery GI Bill through the Veterans Education and Assistance Act Program (VEAP).<sup>111</sup> The VEAP entailed a government match contribution where a soldier contributed \$100 a month in exchange for the Veteran Administration's promised contribution of \$2 for every \$1 that a soldier contributed.<sup>112</sup> The VEAP became an unpopular recruiting incentive for two reasons. First, compared to the GI Bill, the VEAP was a post-service benefit that soldiers could only utilize after leaving the service. Second, VEAP did not extend guaranteed lump sum payments for a college education. VEAP offered "kickers," or lump sums, for recruits willing to enlist under specific military occupational specialties (MOS). Conversely, the GI Bill and its benefits applied to all soldiers that enlisted. The Army finally received funding to bring back the GI Bill after several years without marked improvement in recruitment across all other races. On October 19, 1984, Congress approved the return of the Montgomery GI Bill, which led to another unanticipated surge in African American recruitment.

The return of the GI Bill caused attendant increases in black soldiers because of two factors that included a recession and the rise of the black middle class. From 1981 to 1983, American society suffered another economic recession that increased unemployment within America.<sup>113</sup> However, the recession of 1981 to 1983 differed from previous ones because it impacted large numbers of young middle-class Americans. In turn, this created a larger recruiting

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<sup>111</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 322.

<sup>112</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 511.

<sup>113</sup> Moskos, "Success Story: Blacks in the Army," 71.

pool of youths possessing high school diplomas. The youths that now joined became attracted to the Army for different reasons than their predecessors. The recession generated a recruiting class that endeavored to pursue a college education or learn lucrative trades.

In the case of African Americans, a yearning for higher education especially became prominent. By 1985, African Americans comprised the Army's largest cohort of soldiers with high school diplomas. 95.4 percent of blacks who joined the Army possessed a high school diploma compared to 87.6 percent of whites.<sup>114</sup> The rise in more educated black recruits stemmed from a burgeoning black middle class. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s integrated schools and neighborhoods, which correlated with increases in the number of black high school graduates. Although most African Americans had raised their social status, most families could ill afford to pay for their children's college education. The return of the GI Bill helped bridge that gap. Statistics indicated that 80 percent of black soldiers that joined since 1985 utilized their GI Bill in some capacity.<sup>115</sup> By the end of the 1980s, African Americans continued to enlist as they saw the Army as one of the best facilitators for a college education.

### Motivator to Serve: Individualism and Improved Race Relations

In the early 1970s, racial tensions began to heighten at an alarming rate within the military. Incidents of race riots and "fraggings" throughout the Vietnam War convinced the DOD that it needed to address race relations. On June 24, 1971, Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard issued Directive 1322.11, which directed each armed service to develop a race relations program.<sup>116</sup> The Army proceeded as directed and adopted an Equal Opportunity (EO) program that incentivized African Americans to enlist and reenlist as they began to view the Army as more racially inclusive.

The Army traces the birth of its modern EO program shortly after the creation of the

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<sup>114</sup> Moskos, "Success Story: Blacks in the Army," 67.

<sup>115</sup> Moskos and Butler, *All That We Can Be*, 34.

<sup>116</sup> Hampton, *The Black Officer Corps*, 121.

Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI) in June of 1971.<sup>117</sup> Before the Army developed an independent EO program, DOD policy required each service to send select non-commissioned officers to the DRRI course. After graduating, DRRI required graduates to propagate the lessons they learned and serve as unit level race relations officers. The DOD viewed DRRI as a success, principally because the course used revolutionary methods that forced students to confront underlying causes of racism. During class sessions, the course placed students in compromising positions where they had to resolve notional racial conflicts or provide their personal thoughts concerning African Americans within the military. At times, students discovered that they held prejudicial views and resolved to change their biased views after leaving DRRI.

Army leaders capitalized on the gains that they made from the DOD's DRRI program and quickly began to codify race relations into existing policies. In the 1973 editions of Army Regulations, 600-21 and 600-42, the Army articulated that positive race relations were essential for combat efficiency and held commanders responsible for stewarding race relations in their commands.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, the Army charged the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) with identifying the root causes of racial tensions within Army units and developing solutions to resolve them.<sup>119</sup> ARI developed useful metrics to gauge a soldier's perceptions of racism. The institute began to issue Racial Attitude and Perception Surveys (RAPS) to units where the organization captured patterns of racism within Army units and proposed methods to improve them.<sup>120</sup> In one of their studies, ARI concluded that on average black soldiers enjoyed Army service more than their white counterparts and black soldiers

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>118</sup> Hampton, *The Black Officer Corps*, 130.

<sup>119</sup> Charles C. Moskos, "The Army's Racial Success Story: How Do They Do It?," *The New Republic*, August 5, 1991, 18.

<sup>120</sup> David R. Segal, *Research on Race and Ethnic Relation in the Army* (Washington, DC: US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, US Government Printing Office, 1976), 10.

already began to see race relations improving in the Army.<sup>121</sup>

By 1979 DRRI expanded into the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), which currently trains the Army's corps of EO officers. The expansion of DEOMI also coincided with new policies that extended the Army EO program to address sexism, extremism, and religious discrimination. In the span of nearly a decade, the Army made it clear that it did not condone racism. The Army's ensuing efforts to combat racism convinced growing numbers of black youths to enlist in the 1970s, as they began to see the Army as an equal opportunity employer.

### African Americans and Strategic Aims During The AVF

Much like other periods in history, the Army viewed African Americans as a crucial source of manpower. African Americans still shared a high propensity to enlist despite instances of racial unrest and divisive theories such as the "tipping point." From the Army's perspective, African Americans provided the essential means to posture for a potential large-scale conflict in the years following the Vietnam War. For most of the 1970s, African American recruitment helped offset critical manpower shortages. By the late 1970s, shortages in reenlistments and non-commissioned officers forced the Army to increase recruitment goals.<sup>122</sup> Consequently, in 1979 the Army fell 17,000 soldiers short of meeting its recruitment goals.<sup>123</sup> The Army struggled to brand itself as a viable source of employment, especially since Americans had grown increasingly apathetic toward the military following the Vietnam War. The consistent trend of black youths joining the Army helped offset troop shortages and produced an integral corps of leaders that would ensure the Army's posterity as it moved into the 1980s. The enlisted class of the 1970s continued to reenlist and formed the NCO cadre of the 1980s. By 1986 the Army could count

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 173.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

94,000 black NCOs amongst its ranks.<sup>124</sup> Without the efforts of African Americans, the AVF would undoubtedly struggle to survive.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In *American Patriots*, author Gail L. Buckley succinctly describes the experience of African Americans who served in the Army. Buckley characterizes military service as a potent weapon that black Americans believed would assist them in their quest to eradicate racism.<sup>125</sup> Throughout history, this idea became the prevailing theme that emboldened African Americans to enlist. African Americans invariably believed that the Army could aid in their goals of erasing racism, which would, in turn, secure better paths to citizenship and open up opportunities previously denied to them. As African Americans continued to join, the US Army also benefitted from their efforts. Young black males that enlisted supplied the critical manpower that the Army needed to fulfill enduring military objectives

In the decades preceding the Korean War, the roles of civil rights leaders incited movements that awakened the racial consciousness of black youths. Political rhetoric from leaders such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois roused black youths to enlist as they saw Army service as invaluable if they hoped to improve their citizenship. Additionally, black Americans continued to enlist after surmising that a segregated US society offered little economic opportunities. As African Americans participated in more conflicts, their military service engendered more racial pride, which spurred them to press for more rights. By the end of World War II, the goal of integrating the military supplanted previous objectives of motivating black youths to enlist. In 1948 a galvanized black community finally provided the political momentum that ultimately integrated the military. Once integrated, a new wave of African Americans began to enlist with fresh perspectives on Army service.

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<sup>124</sup> Moskos, "Success Story Blacks in the Army," 70.

<sup>125</sup> Buckley, *American Patriots*, xiii.

During the Korean War, African Americans still enlisted to improve their citizenship, but they also felt inclined to demonstrate their desire to uphold US democracy after the military integrated. Furthermore, black soldiers who served during the Korean War endeavored to gain recognition from their fellow white citizens and demonstrate that the black community has ardent patriots. As the war progressed, another pool of African Americans began to enlist. Soldiers from this class sought to improve their economic disposition. An integrated Army offered three benefits for black soldiers: a steady source of employment, more occupational specialties, and opportunities for career advancement through promotions. For the US Army, integration came at a pivotal time, as commanders desperately needed manpower to counter burgeoning communist threats. Integration also uplifted black soldiers' morale, which made it easier for commanders to galvanize their soldiers to support the Army's strategic aims in Korea. Additionally, the presence of black soldiers on the battlefield convinced allied forces that the US Army mirrored US society.

Following the Korean War, black Americans continued to provide the US Army with the crucial means to accomplish strategic aims for the remainder of the Cold War. However, America's involvement in Vietnam caused a series of political and social events that persuaded the Army that it needed to adjust its recruiting strategies if the Army wanted to convince black youths to enlist. After Congress abolished the draft, the Army attempted to market itself as a volunteer force. In the early years of the AVF, the Army struggled to generate interest from youths that became disaffected with the military following the Vietnam War. However, this trend did not remain consistent with black youths. High recruitment rates amongst African Americans persisted. African Americans still viewed the Army as an institution that could advance their economic status and provide opportunities that the civilian sector could not. The US Army recognized the interdependence it shared with the African American community, and throughout the 1970s, implemented race relations to improve unit effectiveness. The birth of DRRI and modern EO programs further underpinned black recruitment by convincing African Americans that the Army was an equal opportunity employer.

The case study of African American service in the US Army remains relevant today. Examining the history behind African American service illustrates how social, economic, and individual factors can incentivize a specific populace to enlist. Additionally, history has shown that African Americans can provide the valuable means for the US Army to posture for large-scale ground combat operations. Current US Army doctrine categorizes that these operations will likely become enormous in scope.<sup>126</sup> Analyzing intrinsic motivators that encouraged African American enlistment is especially paramount as the future appears increasingly ominous.

If the US Army intends to maintain high African American enlistment rates, it should consider messaging the positive relationship it has historically shared with the black community. The US Army should inform the black public that it initially had a checkered past with the black populace but overcame its faults and eventually aided African Americans in their pursuit of achieving civil rights. The Army could use advertisements and social media to inform black youths of the strides it made in race relations during the AVF. In some respects, the US Army has already leaned forward and has taken additional measures to reevaluate its current racial policies. The US Army's decision to commence Project Inclusion signaled its desire to remove racial biases and divisive archetypes on Army installations.<sup>127</sup> Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy expressed his aim to use Project Inclusion as a platform for soldiers to have uncomfortable conversations concerning race.<sup>128</sup> So far, the Army's efforts with Project Inclusion have succeeded in garnering positive attention. In February 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin illustrated his intent to capitalize on the momentum of Project Inclusion by appointing a commission to rename military bases currently named after Confederate generals.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 1-2.

<sup>127</sup> Kyle Rempfer, "New Initiative Aims to Put Divisive Symbols on No-Fly List, Army Secretary Says," *The Army Times*, July 16, 2020.

<sup>128</sup> Kyle Rempfer, "Army Ditches Officer Promotion Photos as Part of an Effort to Eliminate Unconscious Bias," *The Army Times*, June 25, 2020.

<sup>129</sup> Corey Dickstein, "Austin, Lawmakers Name Eight to Commission for Renaming Military Bases That Honor Confederates," *Stars and Stripes*, February 12, 2021.

The Army can also leverage Project Inclusion as a recruitment opportunity to message how it served as a trendsetter for race relations by integrating and codifying its EO program before most civilian organizations chose to do so. As is the case in most historical periods, the Army once again finds itself on the cusp of an inflection point. However, the current period offers much promise. The Army can capitalize on its gains with African American recruitment by communicating its pledge to maintain an inclusive Army that respects all races. Messaging the Army's history of race relations will inform black youths that have become detached from the idea of military service. Young black Americans will see the Army as an organization that offers the promise of opportunity just like their predecessors did. Additionally, black youths will feel compelled to serve so they can plant the seeds of change just like their forbearers did.

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