

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.
PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10/05/2017	2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2016 - MAY 2017
--------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION REGARDING THE IMPACTS OF UNCONSCIOUS RACIAL BIAS	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A
	5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A

6. AUTHOR(S) Lane, LeRon, E., Major, USMC	5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A
	5e. TASK NUMBER N/A
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Same as #7	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
Since November 10, 1775

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Al-Shabaab; Africa; Egypt; Funding for non-state actors

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USMC Command and Staff College
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	42	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY
Continuing the conversation regarding the impacts of unconscious racial bias

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Major LeRon E. Lane

AY 16-17

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: MATTHEW FLYNN

Approved: _____

Date: 10 MAY 2017

Oral Defense Committee Member: NATHAN PACKARD

Approved: _____

Date: 10 MAY 2017

J.W. Gordon
10 May 2017

Executive Summary

Title: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY-

Continuing the conversation regarding the impacts of unconscious racial bias

Author: Major LeRon Lane

Thesis: Unconscious racial bias within the United States Marine Corps affects the perception of the world's premier fighting force as being a true meritocracy, thus impacting the Marine Corps' operational readiness.

Discussion: Unconscious bias refers to a bias that happens automatically, is outside of our control and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. A failure to recognize how early and how deeply biases can be formed may impact the Marine Corps. All Marines were once children who formed biases of some sort. The way they lead, follow, and what they expect from their subordinates, are inevitably shaped by them.

Conclusion: Without this crucial awareness, the Corps' readiness will suffer and the ability of the USMC to respond to the next crisis perhaps harmed. The author recommends that the Marine Corps bring this subject into regular discussions amongst Marines, address the topic as part of its professional military education (PME) programs, and incorporate training on unconscious racial bias as part of the Marine Corps annual training requirements.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

QUOTATION FROM, ABSTRACTION FROM, OR REPRODUCTION OF ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS DOCUMENT IS PERMITTED PROVIDED PROPER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS MADE.

Table of Contents

	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
DISCLAIMER	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND DIVERSITY	
Introduction.....	1
Definitions.....	6
Bias at an early age	7
HISTORY OF RACIAL TENSION IN THE MARINE CORPS.....	9
DIVERSITY WITHIN THE MARINE CORPS	
The Ideal of Diversity within the Marine Corps.....	12
Commandant’s Guidance.....	14
Lack of diversity in the Marine Corps	16
ANALYSIS	
Results.....	18
Consistent Themes	20
.....	
CONCLUSIONS.....	22
Recommendations.....	24
SOURCES.....	25
Appendix: Highlighted Statements.....	27

Illustrations

	Page
Figure 1. Picture of Lieutenant General Plant Peterson.....	11
Figure 2. Picture of Montford Point.....	11
Figure 3. Racial and Ethnic Composition 2015 through 2055.....	14
Figure 4. Demographic Change 2010 through 2055.....	14
Figure 5. Active Duty Strength as of August 12, 2016.....	16
Figure 6. Active Duty Race Profile as of August 12, 2016	16

Acknowledgements

I love the United States Marine Corps (USMC). From the moment my father earned his Eagle, Globe, and Anchor; and, with it, the title Marine until now, the USMC has influenced every day of my life. This tremendous organization took my father and my mother out of rural Alabama during the days of segregation. Today, I, as their only son, am selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. In more ways than I could ever explain, the USMC has been a part of everything I am.

I thank God for guiding me through this most challenging year of my life. I must also thank my wife Mim for just being who she is, and my sons Jordan and Jacob for being my inspiration for everything. To LtCol Michael Russ, LtCol Kevin Glathar, and LCDR Maurice Buford, thank you for your mentorship. I must also thank Dr. Matthew Flynn and LtCol Kevin Dewitt for not letting me quit when it would have been easy to do so. I also want to thank my sister Tomiko; I could not have completed this without her help.

Finally, I want to thank all the people whose personal statements this study stands upon. These statements provided valuable insight and continue to be an inspiration to pursue this study.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need for the USMC to better understand the subtext that underlies diversity, and become more aware of the pre-existing unconscious cultural biases associated with diversity. The intent is not to impress upon the reader the value of diversity, as this concept is well-appreciated; rather, the purpose is to help Marines become more aware of the need to retain the invaluable diversity within the Marine Corps. Without this crucial awareness, the Corps' readiness will suffer and the ability of the USMC to respond to the next crisis perhaps harmed.

Bias and context

Much of the authors inspiration for tackling this topic stems from personal experience and interviews of fellow Marines, sister service members, and interagency partners documenting their personal experiences as well. In fact, the majority of research rests on oral sources coming from statements provided by USMC leaders, as well as Command and Staff College (CSC) students and faculty, including the author. These statements have been recorded and organized to be readily available in support of the research and findings of this paper. An Appendix to this paper offers a sampling of this methodology. What follows in the body of this paper rests on some of these experiences and statements to help substantiate what often cannot be documented, unspoken, or unacknowledged bias. Too often, the author has had to live this methodology and the frustration of having to prove what remains unsaid or consciously subdued drives much of the research supporting this MMS. This MMS starts a process of capturing this reality and moving it into the open to be further examined, recorded, and better understood.

An example of the personal accounts that merit inclusion in this formal study illustrates the difficulty of presenting the very element the author seeks to document. The inspiration to explore the topic of diversity after overhearing a conversation in a lecture hall at USMC

CSC. Two Marine Corps majors sitting behind me were discussing the temerity of Colin Kaepernick's protest of the National Anthem at National Football League games. Kaepernick now famously, or infamously, took a knee rather than salute the flag and he did so to protest white policemen killing minorities – usually black men – after the police had pulled over these individuals for supposed traffic violations. The two majors' discourse challenged the “Black Lives Matter” demonstrations that Kaepernick tacitly supported with his protest on the football field. These warfighters suggested that the movement's narrative basis stemmed from exaggerated circumstances. The author overheard them say: “those types of things rarely happen,” and, “it only happens to thugs,” and, “those people who deserve such treatment.” The author engaged them to share another perspective. The author explained incidents like the ones they were dismissing occur all too frequently if one happened to have dark skin.

Unfortunately, such an exchange was not isolated at Marine Corps University (MCU). Other examples include when the author was approached by a MCU professor who wanted to ask me a question about race relations here at the school. The author assumes he engaged the author because he was one of a very few black students, who was approachable, and generally thoughtful in commenting. Noticeably angry, he recounted a conversation that he overheard between two majors while walking down the hall. He seemed concerned that it was so obviously out of bounds, yet such a casual conversation about how some black people deserved what consequences that arose from difficult situations, while they ignored the possible existence of bias.

Additionally, the author was selected to help facilitate and moderate the MCU's Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast. Though the event drew a crowd of 53 people, to include Brigadier General Thomas Gorry, only five students attended. This low number resonates all the louder

given that CSC's "Brown Bag" program featuring experts addressing various topics and including students on a volunteer basis is better attended.

Finally, just this January, a fellow CSC student, who is black, studying after hours in the Warner building where that student attends the CSC's program during the day, was approached aggressively and told to get his hands in the air by a civilian Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico policeman. The Marine officer was at a table studying when this incident occurred – an unwarranted incident given that the student was hardly engaged in provoking behavior. While the student calmly explained his purpose for being in the building, thereby defusing a tense situation, the incident should not have occurred in the first place. CSC has made available to students a building pass code that allows access to the building at all hours for the express purpose of studying and related purposes. In this case, the student's initiative to do extra work netted a rebuke in the form of some unwarranted scrutiny. Because he was not wearing his uniform after hours, but was dressed in appropriate civilian attire, one has to assume that race sparked this confrontation in the context of assumptions based on unconscious bias.

The author had a similar experience while in Tampa, Florida, when stationed at MacDill Air Force Base while serving as a communication officer in U.S. Central Command. The author was pulled over at 1323 on a Sunday about 1.5 miles outside the main gate of MacDill Air Force Base for what was perceived to be an expired license plate. The police approached him using very tactical movements with hands on their holstered weapons. Not wearing his uniform at the time, but in formal civilian attire, he explained that he was a field grade officer in the Marine Corps, in an attempt to defuse the situation. Despite disclosing his service, the police officer continued to treat him suspiciously. Only after the author shared that he was the executive officer for an Army General officer was he given some respect. Yet the respect was not for him,

a field grade officer, but for the person he said he was connected to. Moreover, the license plate was valid. To this day, the author is not sure if he should be offended or just content that it ended well. When returning to work, however, the author was not his normal self. He was extra sensitive to being subordinate, especially, as the only black officer in CCJ6, with no one to truly relate with his experience.

This experience is hardly unique among the minority community. A black Navy Commander associated with Training and Education Command assigned to MCU shared with the author that he was stopped by police on the interstate in Georgia for speeding at a rate of five mph over the speed limit. Despite attempting to explain who he was, he was apprehended and taken to jail, simply because his car was similar to one that the police were looking for. This specious motive for incarceration soon revealed itself when the authorities released him the next day.¹

The impact of racial bias also affects our families. The author noticed it recently while preparing his 14-year-old son for a Friday night out with friends. Though the author's son is biracial, he has dark skin, curly hair, and a lot of the author's features. Based on recent and all too common events of police targeting black youths on the basis of their physical attire, the author told his son to put on a belt, take off the hooded sweatshirt, and explained how to act if stopped by police: "make sure you stay very still and always keep your hands where they are visible." He told him to be extra respectful yet not too loud with his tone, and to call him as soon as it is safe. The friend his son went out with that evening was white. That youth recounted to the author that his father prepared him for the evening by merely remarking, "Here is \$10, call me if you need me." While both are Marine fathers, this exchange made clear just how much

¹ Commander Maurice Buford, Chaplain, Marine Corps University, email correspondence, May 5, 2017.

alike, and yet how different their experiences were, and how their children are impacted in divergent ways. Sadly, this exchange between parents and their black children is not unique. Maralee Bradley, a white mother raising a black son, shares a personal account in her article *Dear White Parents of My Black Child's Friends: I Need Your Help*.²

This pattern continues. For example, one of the author's very good friend, a Marine who the author has known since Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) school, also attends CSC. While researching this MMS topic, the author came upon a paper that that major wrote, in which his friend stated, "we are all the same." "We all have the same opportunity and the USMC doesn't need more diversity. It just needs more good people," he wrote.³ Disturbed by this bland generalization, the author sought out additional avenues of research to get past this assumed attitude that diversity is no longer an issue. A battalion commander, a white Lieutenant Colonel who spoke only on the condition of anonymity, said the same thing when asked about diversity in the USMC. "We are all green. No spoken or unspoken difference. The Marines who have trouble, will only go so far, are naturally not going to make it. The problems that they have encountered are the result of their upbringing, not their experience in the Marine Corps."⁴

These and many similar circumstances and anecdotes make it clear that the Marine Corps needs to continue the conversation on a structured and regular basis regarding the challenges many black Marines face while serving their nation. Since November 10, 1775, men and women have come from every corner and every social class of America and its territories to be forged in the crucible that makes United States Marines. The training levied upon these ordinary citizens

² Maralee Bradley, "Dear White Parents Of My Black Child's Friends: I Need Your Help," *Scary Mommy*, accessed May 8, 2017, http://www.scarymommy.com/black-child-friends/?utm_source=FBOnsite.

³ The source wrote this statement in a formally published periodical not referenced here in order to maintain anonymity. It is available upon request.

⁴ This information was derived from an interview with a senior officer who is purposely not identified in order to honor a request for anonymity.

has been carefully developed and refined over many years to transform and equip physically and mentally average human beings into some of the most revered warriors in history. The USMC has earned a formidable reputation as the greatest fighting force the world has ever seen. Despite the universal training that attempts to imbue each recruit, midshipmen, and officer candidate with the Corps' core values of *Honor, Courage, and Commitment*, the Marine Corps is comprised of human beings. Each human being brings with them the values, ethics, and beliefs ingrained in them before joining the Corps. Colonel William McCollough, Director, USMC Command and Staff College, acknowledged the need to live up to expectations underlying service in the USMC. He commented to the author by email: "people enter the Marine Corps with already developed biases. A leader can only discover these biases through consistent and meaningful interaction with those he or she serves with, and must always have a plan to change those biases that are antithetical to our ethos, as well as to reinforce those that are complementary. If leaders don't fill this role, others will, and we may not like the results."⁵ Unconscious racial bias within the USMC affects the perception of the world's premier fighting force as being a true meritocracy, thus impacting the Marine Corps operational readiness.

Definitions

Webster defines bias as "a tendency to believe that some people, ideas, etc., are better than others that usually results in treating some people unfairly."⁶ Unconscious bias refers to a "bias that happens automatically, is outside of our control and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background,

⁵ Colonel William McCollough, Director, USMC Command and Staff College, personal correspondence in response to an email request from the author for information on bias within the USMC. Mar 24, 2017.

⁶ "Bias." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed May 8, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/biased>.

cultural environment and personal experiences.”⁷ Racial bias is a harmful aversion to, stereotyping of, or discrimination against a race.

Bias at an Early Age

The topic of unconscious racial bias is often tough to discuss. These discussions are awkward and evoke a myriad of emotions. Since the individual Marines that form the greater Marine Corps are a cross-section of society, it is important to understand how society’s biases are formed and how they impact the lives of those who will, one day, influence the USMC. In September 2016, Kelly Wallace, from CNN reported on a study that concluded racial bias might start as early as preschool.⁸ The study speaks of how uncomfortable most people become when discussing implicit bias. It is an especially difficult subject for those who consider themselves free of implicit bias. As Wallace says in the article, “We all have it. We're just not always aware of it and how deeply rooted it can be. It is certainly an issue we've been grappling with as a country for the past 5 years as part of a national conversation about race and policing after dozens of shootings of black men by white police officers.” According to Wallace, data from the U.S. Department of Education's 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection reveals that black children in preschool are three times more likely to be suspended than white children.⁹ Considering those statistics, Walter Gilliam, Director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, conducted a unique study to investigate if one of the reasons for that racial disparity was unconscious bias on the part of teachers. During this study, the 130 teachers that participated were told the goal of the study was trying to learn

⁷ Sandy Sparks, “What is Unconscious Bias; considerations and top tips.” *ECU: 2013 Unconscious bias in higher education*, accessed May 8, 2017, https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/ldc/researchers/opportunities/development_support/e_and_d/unconscious_bias/unconscious_bias_-2_june.pdf.

⁸ Kelly Wallace, “Study: racial bias might start as early as preschool,” CNN, last updated, Wed September 28, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/28/health/racial-bias-preschool/>.

⁹ Ibid.

how teachers detect challenging behavior. They were asked to view videos of preschoolers in a school environment and explained that not all the videos contained challenging behavior. All of the students in the videos were actors and none exhibited challenging behavior. The study utilized eye-tracking technology, to discover that the teachers spent most of their time watching boys and black children, not girls and white children. When questioned as to which children required most of their attention, 42% percent the teachers said black boys did, while 34% said white boys required most of their attention, followed by 13% for white girls and 10% for black girls.¹⁰

The results of this particular study show how bias can have a devastating impact as early as a black child's preschool years. What appears to be happening is that teachers are expecting more challenging behaviors from the black children, especially black boys, and therefore may track them more in the classroom than they do other children.

According to Gilliam, "Low expectations for students (of any age) can have very devastating impacts... We know this from decades of research on this topic. Children tend to live up to our expectations and they also tend to live down to them."¹¹ By its very definition, unconscious racial bias is a product of one's experiences and environment, becomes an automatic part of one's thinking, and leads to potentially unfair aversions and stereotyping. The results of the aforementioned study are cause for great concern. The non-black students may be influenced at a very early age that the students that need more attention and seem to cause the most trouble are the little black boys. These children may grow up to believe that stereotype and engage in social relationships accordingly. Conversely, young black male students may be

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *A first look key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools*, (U.S. Department of Education), Issued: June 7, 2016 | Revised: October 28, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>.

¹¹ Wallace, "Study."

influenced to believe that they are indeed the biggest challenge, and that expectations for them reflect that. They may grow up to believe in these biases, thus limiting themselves to achieving them. They may also grow up with an unconscious bias that all white people think of them as a challenge. Regardless of racial background, these biases will impact how the children grow up to treat others or expect to how be treated. A failure to recognize how early and how deeply biases can be formed, may impact the Marine Corps. All Marines were once children who formed biases of some sort. The way they lead, follow, and what they expect from their subordinates are inevitably shaped by them.

History of Racial Tension in the Marine Corps

When one volunteers to join the USMC, they embark on a rite of passage in the hope to earn the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor medallion, and the title of Marine. They are dedicating themselves to an organization that espouses the highest standards of warfighting proficiency, camaraderie, dedication to the missions assigned, and unwavering dedication to everybody who has ever borne the title Marine. They are also dedicating themselves to an organization that has a history of being accused of overt racial bias, a service that was the last to racially integrate, and an institution that struggled to relate to society during and in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement. This bias, much like that imposed upon children at a young age, found a home in the early rise of the USMC and it grew as the service grew.

From its creation in 1775 until President Roosevelt issued the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941, very few minorities served in the Marine Corps.¹² Though the Marine Corps opened its doors to members of all races, the opportunities were very limited.¹³ The 17th

¹² Henry I. Shaw and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), 5.

¹³ Alphonse G. Davis, *Pride, Progress, and Prospects: The Marine Corps' Efforts to Increase the Presence of African-American Officers (1970-1995)* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2000), 1.

Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Thomas Holcomb, stated in 1941, “the Negro race’s desire to enter the naval service is largely, I think, to break into a club that doesn’t want them.”¹⁴ General Holcomb declared that, “If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 negroes, I would rather have the whites.”¹⁵ The Marine Corps was the last American military service to allow blacks to enter its ranks. Although the bravery of black warriors serving in every American war had been well documented, the USMC leadership still expressed an overarching concern over the ability of black men to serve in combat because of their perceived lack of bravery, intelligence, and discipline. “With the beginning of World War II, African Americans would get their chance to be in ‘the toughest outfit going,’” the previously all-white Marine Corps,” said historian Gerry Butler.¹⁶ The first recruits reported to Montford Point, a small section of land on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina on August 26, 1942.”¹⁷ The men would graduate, become Marines, and serve with great distinction during some of the toughest battles in which the Marine Corps would see action, fighting at Saipan, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima. Despite showing themselves to be the great and brave warriors that have become synonymous with the name Marine, black Marines still found themselves struggling to overcome racial bias within the Corps. At a Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) event aboard Montford Point, the guest of honor, the base commander of MCB Camp Lejeune, Major General Henry Larsen, commented in the summer of 1943, while addressing the crowd formed for the event that he had seen women Marines and dog Marines, but when he saw “you people” in

¹⁴ Nalty C. Bernard, “The Right to Fight African-American Marines in World War II,” *Marines in World War II Commemorative Series*, 4, accessed May 8, 2017, http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/The%20Right%20to%20Fight%20African-American%20Marines%20in%20World%20War%20II%20PCN%2019000313200_1.pdf

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁶ Gerry, Butler, “Montford Point Marines (1942-1949),” *blastfromthe past.org*, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.blackpast.org/>

¹⁷ Bernard, 5

uniform he knew there was a war on.¹⁸ The men had earned the title Marine, they swore to defend the Constitution of the United States of America, yet to some, it was more shocking to see them serve as Marines, than it was to see a dog serve as a Marine.

The above offers a short insight into the less publicized history of racial bias in the Marine Corps. The good news is that with each generation of Marines, the overt acts would become fewer. In 1973, Frank Peterson had ascended to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was the senior black officer in the Marine Corps. He would go on to become the first minority general officer in 1979, and would eventually ascend to the rank of Lieutenant General.¹⁹ While overt acts of conscious racial bias began to dissipate, unconscious racial bias from the Marines serving in the Corps, and unconscious biases that remained from historic policies of the Marine Corps, have never completely gone away. In fact, on March 23, 2017, while addressing the Marine students and faculty at MCU, aboard MCB Quantico, the 18th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, SgtMaj Ronald L. Green recalled a conversation in which the Secretary of the Naval Secretary Ray Mabus told him that, “the Marine Corps is the last to change anything. They were the last to want African American, and the last to want females.”²⁰ The conversation was specifically addressing the Marines United issue, but it sheds light on the fact that many unconscious biases still remain within the USMC. SgtMaj Green shed even greater light on this problem when he explained that congress told him that, “the Marine Corps is first to fight, but last when it comes to human beings.”²¹

¹⁸ Ibid, 6.

¹⁹ Davis, 17.

²⁰ Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, SgtMaj Ronald L. Green, USMCU all hands, March 23, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.



Figure 1 - LtGen Plant Peterson



Figure 2 - Montford Point

The Ideal of Diversity within the Marine Corps

Most Marines, especially career-oriented Marines, are aware of America's history and the Marine Corps' history relating to racial tensions and prejudice. Most people join the Marine Corps to be a part of something greater than oneself, to uphold the highest standards and values, and to be a part of a team that boasts of never leaving a Marine behind. Choosing death before dishonor. Most Marine leaders, non-commissioned officers and above, agree with or at least acknowledge the Marine Corps' desire to reap the benefits of a more racially diverse force. Many argue that the need for diversity is fine as long as it does not detract from the ultimate reason for the USMC existence: to *fight* and *win* America's battles.

Diversity in the workplace can have tremendous benefits. All of the unique attributes of a person, whether it be differences in race, language, religion, social status and age, can enhance or detract from the work environment. Workers with diverse backgrounds bring unique experiences, ideas,

and perceptions to each task that can result in increased productivity and a dynamic team oriented social experience. Additionally, every employee has their own individual strengths and weaknesses. A diverse working environment can draw from the strengths of each member, while complementing or overcoming the weaknesses of each other to make a cohesive team of professionals instead of co-located employees. Unconscious bias is a huge threat to the positive

impacts that diversity can bring. “Winning companies, like winning football teams, build a culture of teamwork and camaraderie. Their people value the unique strengths each team member brings to the fold” according to Joe Hanel, writer from the *Charlotte Business Journal*. Hanel continues by writing “Now, perhaps more than ever, a company’s reputation is everything. Companies that embrace diversity are widely respected.”²² This message applies to the USMC as well, an institution that strives for excellence in personnel, and cannot do so free of diversity that permeates all parts of the United States.

In this unstable world, the USMC has been and will continue to be called upon to provide an agile and versatile force in readiness as a viable option to the leaders of this nation. The previously mentioned advantages of a diverse work force are more important than ever as it relates to productivity. The respect that is garnered from having a military service that is known for attempting to live up to its espoused beliefs will prove invaluable in recruiting and retaining the best and brightest people from all facets of society into the Marine Corps. More importantly, having a Marine Corps that acknowledges and works toward understanding and reducing the impact of unconscious racial bias will not only recruit the best and the brightest, it will retain them beyond their initial obligation. When the Marines retain such individuals, it can begin to promote leaders that recognize and embrace the benefits that each unique population contribute. Additionally, the service garners a greater return on the investment that is put into training each individual Marine when Marines choose to serve additional tours.

The leadership of the Marine Corps acknowledges the need for a more diverse workforce that is statistically more representative of the nation it serves. The demographics of America are changing. It is estimated that the White population will decrease from 70 percent currently to 50

²²Joe Hanel, “3 ways a diverse workplace can positively impact an organization,” *Charlotte Business Journal*, 2017, <http://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/news/2017/03/06/3-ways-a-diverse-workplace-can-positively-impact.html>

percent of the United States population by 2050.²³ As the demographics of America change, the face of the Marine Corps should also change to reflect the population it serves. The following two graphs, provided by the *Washington Post*, give a graphical depiction of how the racial composition of America is changing.

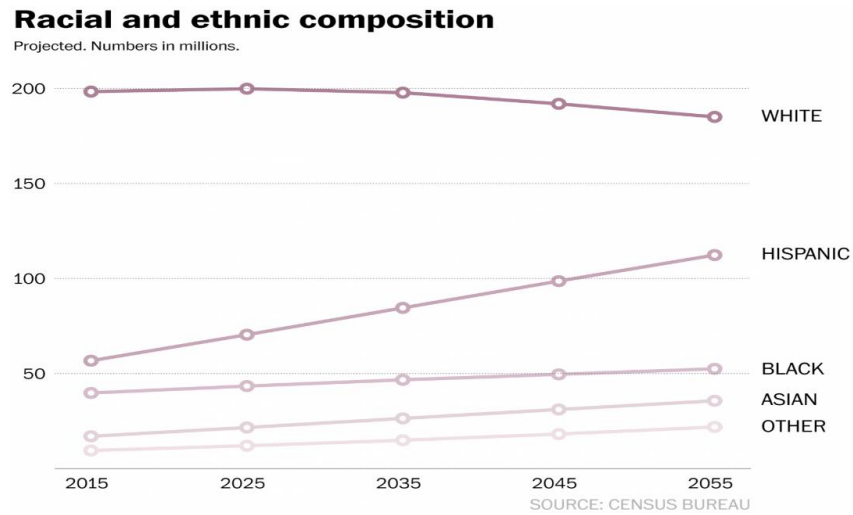


Figure 3 - Racial and Ethnic Composition 2015 through 2055.

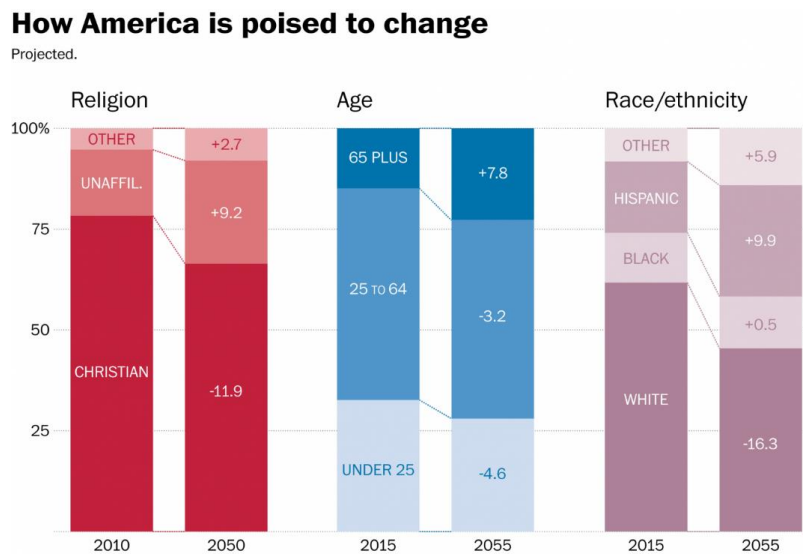


Figure 4 - Demographic Change 2010 through 2055.

²³ Philip Bump, “What America will look like in 2050, in 4 charts,” *Washington Post.com*, last updated April 3, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/04/03/what-america-will-look-like-in-2050-less-christian-less-white-more-gray/?utm_term=.376f5aa0d68b

Commandant's Guidance

Based on his understanding of the benefits of having a diverse force and the changing demographics of America, the 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller, published “The Commandant of the Marine Corps Diversity Policy.” In his policy, General Neller articulates that, “Marine Corps leaders have the moral imperative and professional duty to take care of Marines. This means accessing, promoting and retaining Marines in a manner that is consistent with our core values.”²⁴ He continues by defining diversity as the aggregate of the varied cultures, backgrounds, talents, skills and abilities among Marines.²⁵ Next, the Commandant explains that it will take a comprehensive talent management system to enhance existing leadership, training and education, and manpower systems that attract, access, develop, promote and retain the best talent the Nation has to offer in to more effectively operate.²⁶ General Neller skillfully addresses the notion of increasing diversity to merely represent parity. He states, “Diversity in our Corps is rooted in the understanding that the objective is not merely to strive for representational parity with the facts of the Nation, but to meet the global challenges ahead with all the strengths, talents, characteristics, and culture of the total force.”²⁷ He charges leaders at all levels with promoting this policy. In closing, the Commandant delivers the most powerful and direct statement of the entire policy statement. He clearly states that, “In everything Marines do and with all that Marines are, there can be no doubt about the importance placed upon leading diversity.”²⁸ The author, like most Marine Corps leaders, has read, assessed, synthesized, and committed himself to executing the Commandant's policy statement. He

²⁴ 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller, published “The Commandant of the Marine Corps Diversity Policy”

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ *Ibid*

personally feels it is brilliant in its wording and in the direction it offers. However, as previously stated, the unconscious racial biases that exist within individual Marines threatens to undermine the Commandant’s diversity policy.

Lack of diversity in the Marine Corps

It is a simply a fact that for many reasons the Marine Corps lacks diversity at every level in comparison to the demographics of the other military services and compared to the demographics of the nation. As Figures 5 and 6 reveal, the Marine Corps has the lowest percentage of minorities in general, and the lowest percentage of blacks specifically.

Assigned Strength of Active Duty Force				
Service	Enlisted	Officers	Total	Percentage
Army	452,064	87,610	539,675	37.8%
Navy	275,296	51,388	326,684	22.9%
Marine Corps	178,213	20,202	198,415	13.9%
Air Force	258,095	64,805	322,900	22.6%
Coast Guard	33,228	8,134	41,362	2.9%
Total	1,196,897	232,139	1,429,036	100%

Figure 5 - Active Duty Strength as of August 12, 2016

Race Profile of Active Duty Force				
Service	% White	% Minorities	% Black	% Other
Army	73.9 %	26.1 %	21.5 %	4.6 %
Navy	66.2 %	33.8 %	19.3 %	14.4 %
Marine Corps	83.7 %	16.3 %	11.1 %	5.2 %
Air Force	78.1 %	21.9 %	15.6 %	6.3 %
Coast Guard	82 %	18 %	6.1 %	11.9 %
Total	74.6 %	25.4 %	17.8 %	7.6 %

Figure 6 - Active Duty Race Profile as of August 12, 2016

The Marine Corps and the department of the Navy have acknowledged that recruiting and retaining diversity is extremely important and is lacking in comparison to the demographics of the country. Also acknowledge is that this shortcoming needs to be addressed. There are now great people assigned to continue doing great work toward recruiting and retaining the highly-qualified individuals to begin to address that fact. That will take time. It has taken 241 years to get to this point. It will take several years to see a noticeable change. To this end, the Marine Corps and Department of the Navy have implemented organizations specifically charged with diversity matters. The offices are a large part of the Marine Corps corporate approach to systematically investing, supervising, and orchestrating changes in its diversity posture. For example, the Marine Corps' Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management Branch (MPE), and the United States Naval Academy's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity (ODIEO) office, have been specifically commissioned to further the Marine Corps' mission of inclusion and fair treatment. The mission of the United States Naval Academy Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity (ODIEO) office is to support, foster, and leverage the unique and diverse talents of faculty, staff, and future Navy and Marine Corps officers through an inclusive Naval Academy campus and community environment free from discrimination or harassment of any kind. As of October 2016, the Naval Academy has fully incorporated the offices of Equal Opportunity/Command Climate Specialist and Equal Employment Opportunity. This realignment is in accordance with an Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) directive.²⁹

The Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management (MPE) Branch is responsible for developing and administering the equal opportunity and diversity policies for the Marine

²⁹ Mission of the Office of Diversity, Inclusion & Equal Opportunity, <https://www.usna.edu/Diversity/index.php>

Corps. The Branch is dedicated to fostering an institutional commitment to maintaining the highest standards, treating all individuals with dignity and respect, and affording every Marine an equal opportunity for professional advancement based on individual merit and appropriate talent management. Additionally, the branch head advises the Commandant on manpower issues, policy, recruitment, and retention as they relate to equal opportunity.³⁰ These two offices, when combined with the efforts of the diversity recruiting office within Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) and guided by the Commandant's Diversity Policy, address the tangible aspect relating to helping diversity positively impact the Marine Corps. What is equally if not more important, but harder to access is the impact of unconscious racial bias.

As defined early in this paper, this type of bias is automatic, and it is often deeply rooted. Sometimes the first instinct of the person displaying this trait is that they are not even aware of it and they are offended at the thought of having such a bias. Yet, it is instinctual based on experience. Imagine the response if a combat veteran was asked to ignore the instincts that were developed by their experience. The author, a combat veteran, jumps at loud noises. No matter how hard he tries not to, he jumps. The author has told himself not to jump, but there is nothing that he can do to stop this natural reflex. In response, the author is no longer in denial. His family and friends understand, and continue to help prepare him for, or recover from these incidents.

Results

³⁰ Mission of The Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management (MPE) Branch, https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/webcenter/portal/MPE;jsessionid=zwXsegBI5jSKIBApNOv0SWQP77rbczpHINvh9jE60wF2BT9r67Sf!1288618307!1990291281?_adf.ctrl-state=cvcfu8hep_215&_afLoop=325496836594649#!%40%40%3F_afLoop%3D325496836594649%26_adf.ctrl-state%3D12kf74ae0_4

This paper confirms the need for much deeper thought and considerable regular focus on diversity in the USMC. There are currently seven black officers that are assigned as students at the Marine Corps' CSC. All of them revealed that they have experienced the negative impacts of unconscious racial bias or have witnessed it. That 100% confirmation was initially surprising. The statements received from the two senior SNCOs who are currently students at CSC further confirmed that racial issues play a role in one's recruitment into and service in the Marines. The personal statements from the various members of the student body of CSC, include statements from students, faculty and staff members. Only two members, both white males, indicated that the Marine Corps provides a fair opportunity for all of its members because Marines are no longer viewed as members of individual racial groups, we are all green.

This notion that we are all green is admirable, but it may be problematic in its own right. An organization that is color blind instead of embracing its multicultural attributes is, at best, missing out on the benefits of diversity. At worst, they are not simply colorblind, they may simply be blind, in general, to the issues within the organization. All four law enforcement officers that the author interviewed for this paper, indicated the value of being able to empathize with the populations and each indicated the value that diversity plays in enhancing their relationship with the community they are assigned to protect. Two of the SNCOs, Sergeant Majors and both black, indicated that although they have been fortunate to have not experienced or at least recognized any unconscious racial bias directed towards them, they are aware of it and acknowledge that it exists. Ironically, one of the Marines that provided a statement works in a unit that is supervised by one of these gentlemen. The bias that is impacting the unit is not overt and is not visible to all, but it is impacting the members, thus it is impacting the whole.

What may be most telling comes from the statement of an international student. A German Lieutenant Colonel assigned to Marine Corps CSC indicated that he finds the USMC to be greatly impacted by unconscious racial bias. In fact, he specifically said, “The Marine Corps is so racist; in the way that people talk down to certain individuals, as if they are superior. It is not just by rank either. It is clear.”³¹ Dr. Nathan Packard is an associate history professor at Marine Corps University’s CSC and had this to say about the social environment at the school:

Having spent the past six years teaching PME at the Naval Academy and for the Naval War College, I’ve been surprised by what fits within the realm of professional discourse at MCU. Some examples that come to mind are open and vocal hostility towards the “Black Lives Matter” movement and former President Barack Obama, as well as a tendency to chock up professional setbacks, such as not getting promoted, to diversity initiatives. This behavior is by no means widespread, but the fact that I’ve heard it at all, should be cause for concern. These were things I just did not hear while working for the Navy.³²

These statements help remind the Marine Corps to continue to undertake the difficult task of identifying unconscious racial bias. Doing so within PME has the added benefit of carrying this sound practice into the operational forces, thereby aiding efforts at force readiness.

Consistent Themes

This paper has identified and presented several key, compelling, and consistent themes. Complacency is prevalent on both sides. Black professionals typically accept things as normal and do not anticipate change. Those that deny the existence of racial bias are also content with the way things are. Others are just oblivious to the situation.

- It stands to reason that like socializes with like because there is less tension and more understanding and compassion. Having the same mindset and expectations only breeds this cultural divide.

³¹ Lieutenant Colonel Simon Rugee, German Army, Student, CSC, CG11, AY 16-17, email correspondence, May 3, 2017.

³² Dr. Nathan Packard, Associate Professor, CSC, email correspondence, April 28, 2017

- Blacks cannot make the exact same decisions as their Caucasian counterparts without “drawing attention” themselves. People that do not see anything wrong believe that blacks often bring on the treatment they received. A smile and positive demeanor for a white person affords them some freedoms where the same smile and well behaved, respectful demeanor does not count for much for a person of color in the same situation.
- Because leadership plays a key role in diversity and equal opportunities, leaders should be willing to stop and listen and then engage with the mindset of, “Tell me what you need so that I can show up with the right tools to make an impact and take steps to promote change.” Lack of diversity awareness weakens this charge.
- Diversity is not a one and done movement. It takes continuous efforts. We are still facing some of the same challenges our country has endured over several generations and only seeing a modicum change.
- A black person achieving an award or being recognized for superior achievements is often met with criticism and questions rather than pure praise. More often than not, accomplishments are judged with more scrutiny and validated more thoroughly to make sure the accolades are warranted thus not giving adequate credit to achievements.
- In many homes, there are different conversations going on between black children and their parents than with white children. A black parent needs to teach their children the basics of growing but have to add to their child rearing routine, the dynamics of “doing everything you can to get home in one piece.”
- Some people are so isolated from diversity that their perspective and perception of others are learned mostly through news and movie/TV characters. These outlets do not often portray African Americans in a positive light.

- The sign of the times plays a big factor on perception and acceptance or to resistance to diversity. Whether it be the 1950s and 1960s eras or today in 2017, racial tensions played out in the world affect how even decorated military personnel are treated in and out of uniform.
- Blacks have no choice but to overachieve in order to get the same respect as a peer whose most qualifying “accomplishment” is to be fortunate enough to be born with the accepted skin color.
- Character and reputation can help diffuse a situation when attempts are made to disparage a person’s name when false accusations are made against them. This is another reason why a black person must do their part in looking and behaving differently from the preconceived notions present before getting to know the individual. Often, one black person pays for the misconduct of another simply because of someone’s prejudgment.
- Making assumptions about someone simply by their name or position before a face to face encounter can often lead to an unfortunate situation. Someone can be overly casual and disrespectful in the conversations when assuming a person of color could not possibly be in a position of power and they might use racial slurs. Upon discovering the truth during a face to face, they compose themselves and the conversation and the tone changes, where they, in turn, make better word choices, becoming more professional. It is unfortunate that a person of color might find the need to have friends in high places behind them in order to garner the respect and authority they were given per their position just to get their job done.
- “Racist” has become such an undesirable label that it is looked upon as a truly cutting insult. When that label is lavished on someone their behaviors and beliefs are suddenly

quantified so that the moniker is deflected. There are a lot more disclaimers that start with, “I don’t mean to offend but here’s my belief. I’m not a racist.”

Conclusion

After collecting 57 personal statements as research for this project, and after attending the various events that the author used to help guide his efforts, it became remarkably clear that unconscious racial bias plays a substantial role in the lives of Marines. The author purposefully cast a wide net to draw from a large and diverse pool of sources. The results became so impactful that he became emboldened enough to begin asking random individuals for their opinions. The author only used the random results as background that helped enhance the results of his formal inquiries. The results were pretty clear. Of the 57 statements received, 55 acknowledged that racial bias regularly impacts their lives. Most were impacted directly, the others witnessed the effects. One-hundred percent of the black Marines said that unconscious racial bias is expected and almost accepted. The impacts are often regarded as “the cost of them doing business” as a minority in the service that we love. Of the two individuals who expressed experience with this type of bias, one said that race relations in the USMC are not perfect, but are an example that society should strive to mimic. The other person, a field grade Marine officer, feels that the Marine Corps is colorblind and that is how it should be. He feels that the actions of a person are all that matters and the Corps gets it right. In light of the overwhelming sentiments from people of all ranks, social, and racial backgrounds that were involved in this effort, maybe it is unconscious bias that prevents him, a blonde haired, blue eyed, combat arms officer from identifying with this issue. Additionally, the author also think unconscious racial bias works both ways. It does not merely impact how you treat others. It also impacts how you expect to be treated in advance of reality.

The USMC is a people business. All of the advanced weapons systems and the best strategy in the world is useless without the Marines to employ the system and carry out those missions. What sets the Marine Corps apart from any other service is the comradery and the trust that we have in the Marine next to us. When that trust becomes questionable, then the cascading effects impact mission readiness. The positive impacts of a diverse force that provides multiple views toward solving complex problems are diminished by bias, thus the Marine is not availing itself to the very best. Retaining the best and brightest force that is a qualified and fair representation of society is challenged by unconscious bias. Many people join the Marine Corps because of the espoused beliefs the Marine Corps promotes. When young men and women dedicate themselves to a belief system that disappoints them in its execution, retaining those Marines and the training invested in them will be difficult. What may be more difficult is recruiting future Marines from their spheres of influence.

A senior Marine officer told the author that he firmly believes the Marine Corps promotion boards are fair. He explained that what is presented to the boards is not the problem. He indicated that if the biases of those evaluating Marines are not addressed, then the most qualified Marines are not promoted and the compositions of the Marine Corps' leadership is thus impacted. The Marine Corps organizes to fight in teams. These teams are as large as a Marine Air Ground Task Force, but as small as a two-person buddy team. Trust amongst these teams is paramount. Finally, the strength of the Marine Corps is the individual Marine. If that Marine does not feel valued or if that Marine does not value others then the Marine Corps strength is compromised.

Recommendations

The author recommends the Marine Corps bring this subject into the regular discussions amongst Marines. He suggests it becomes part of required annual training, much like other

sensitive training like sexual assault and other equal opportunity subjects. He suggests that a computer based training (CBT) module, like the Harvard based bias test, be implemented in addition to the other CBTs done by each Marine each year. If addressing the impacts of unconscious racial bias is truly important, it must be treated as such. Marines go to the rifle range annually because it is that important to the organization. Additionally, the author recommends the Commanding Officer and the SgtMaj in each unit personally and formally address the Commandant's' diversity policy in order to give a first-hand account of the importance of each Marine to every member of the organization. This should be followed by the subordinate leaders doing the same. The policy should be displayed appropriately in each work area. Lastly, this subject matter should become a formal class that is taught at each accession point and at each formal school and prior to being able to assume command above the company level.

Sources

Much of the author's research for this paper was done via personal interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to gain first-hand accounts from Marines and those who significantly influence their lives in order illustrate just how common and impactful unconscious racial bias is. He purposefully cast a very wide net. He interviewed or received the statements of 57 individuals. These were Marines or people who have significant influence in the lives of Marines. The racial breakdown of those who contributed to this effort was two Asian, 29 black, and 26 white subjects, by gender, 11 females and 46 males. This group broke down by service as follows: two Department of State (DoS), 2 USA, 4 USAF, 31 USMC, 7 USN, 11 other and by profession, 2 business men, 1 German Officer, 1 Information Technology professional, 1 junior enlisted Marine, 4 Law Enforcement personnel, 1 non-commissioned officer, 37 Officers (2

Chap, 1 JAG, 3 Diversity Officers), 2 professors, 1 retired USMC, 5 Staff Non-Commissioned officers (SNCO), 1 Teacher, and 1 Army Veteran. Within the group of officers, the author interviewed 6 other black officers that are currently students at CSC. He also reached out to 2 staff non-commissioned officers; both demand a paygrade of E-9 that are students attending CSC.

The author reached out to several other students. These students were Marine officers and officers of each sister service attending Command and Staff College. He continued his research by reaching out to two sergeant majors from outside the commands. In an effort to ensure a varied base of information, he reached out to a junior Marine and a non-commissioned officer. He reached out to police officers from three different geographical areas. He interviewed three young black business professionals, two of which have become successful entrepreneurs. He also interviewed veterans who served during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

The author expanded his research by interviewing the leadership of the Marine Corps' Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management Branch (MPE) and the United States Naval Academy's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity (ODIEO). He reached out to officers serving at United States Central Command, and at Marine Forces South. While conducting research, he interviewed a captain currently serving at Headquarters Marine Corps and three captains who are currently students at Marine Corps Expeditionary War School. In addition, he interviewed a lieutenant colonel who is currently studying at the Marine Corps War College. Finally, he was fortunate enough to attend social gatherings where the topic of discussion was very much like the topic of this paper. The audience of these events was astonishing to him. At one event, he had dinner and personal conversations with former

regimental commanders and a lieutenant general who were passionate about understanding and overcoming the impacts of biases on the Marine Corps. He solicited comments from two members of the DoS, one canvassing recruiter, and two parents. He spent time with a current battalion commander who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

In the process of conducting these interviews, he was privileged to attain several other bits of information gleaned from informal conversations that shaped much of the content of this paper. He carefully and specifically cast a wide net in an effort to gain as many different perspectives from multiple sources in order to ascertain the commonality and frequency of unconscious racial bias. He chose the Marines to interview based solely on rank, race, and unit. He chose members of other services to gain the perspective of these officers who may lead Marines in a joint environment. The author found value in interviewing law enforcement officers to gain insight into the role race plays in policing. He chose to interview the business professionals and the parents because the issues that impact them, impact their communities. Even if Marines are insulated from the issues of society each day while at work and in uniform, the citizen can never completely be separated from the soldier. Their loved ones are often members of communities that are involved in, or resemble those involved in, the issues impacting the country. Finally, he interviewed two chaplains, one white chaplain, and one black chaplain, in order to gain their unique perspectives.

Appendix: Highlighted Statements

In addition to the key themes raised in this paper, the following three statements are some of the most impactful that the author was privileged to receive. Attached in entirety, they provide great insight into the issue and illustrate in detail many of the bullet points detailed in the *Results* section of the paper.

In this first statement, a black male marine who is serving in a combat arms military occupational specialty provided the following comments. It is worth noting that he would only speak off the record out of concern of reprisal and long-term impacts to his career. His statement is as follows:

I'm a combat arms Marine with fourteen years of active duty service. I have been stationed in all there MEF's and have deployed to both OIF and OEF conducting combat operations. It is common knowledge that the Marine Corps is about 10% African American but I'm not even sure what that percentage is in the combat arms. Anecdotally, throughout my career, I am usually one of two 'diverse' officers at the battalion level and above with rare exceptions. Through observations and experiences, I do not believe the Marine Corps to be an organization that promotes or condones racism and bigotry. However, similar to many organizations in America, racism and bigotry still exists in various forms. Overall, throughout my career I can say that I have experienced very few overtly racist actions or comments. In contrast, I have experienced numerous 'off color' comments that were questionable to their intent. Meaning, I was not sure if the comments were meant as poorly thought out jokes or if they were an intentional bigoted or racist comment. What I will present here are just a few personal situations and stories to highlight some of the situations I have experienced that I believe are attributed to my race.

Groupings: One thing that all black officers learn very early is that gathering in group of more than two black officers is a no-no. I can't count how many times by coincidence I've been a group discussion with fellow black officers and someone will walk by and say, "Hey, are yawl having a meeting?" This is not a singular phenomenon because I have talked to numerous black officer and almost to a Marine they all encountered this. What is interesting is the phenomenon it creates in all of our careers. Because of the comments, we began to intentionally avoid these "group" interactions. We also sometimes intentionally socializing with other black officer (at least initially) on the occasions when there is actually more than one officer. I distinctly remember one occasion during resident PME at EWS as a Captain when after 6-7 months in school I happened to have a conversation in the hallway with 2 other black officers. One was my best friend and the other was a Marine I had just met. Keep in mind, the conversation ironically was about how we had avoided each other the entire year and like clockwork a white Marine Officer walked by and asked, "Are yawl having a meeting?" For some reason that occasion didn't sit well with me and I stopped that Marine and asked him, "why did you just ask that?" He fumbled through some words and then said, "I'm sorry, I was wrong." My fellow conference group members saw that I was upset and asked me why I was so upset. I spent the next 15-20 talking with all of them and explaining how those comments make black officers feel. It makes us feel like outsiders. I explained to them that every day we walk into a room of mostly white

Marines and Officers and usually it's not even on our minds that we are probably the only black Marine in the entire room. However, when those comments are made it makes you feel like your fellow Marines see you differently just because the color of your skin.

My awakening: I was deployed around the time the Trayvon Martin shooting in Florida had occurred. My organization shared an open office on Marines from the rank of senior field grade officer to LCpl. One of the senior officers who was a white male, was very outspoken about the entire case and expressed his opinions very loudly so all could hear I tried ignoring him to avoid any friction. Then the current POTUS, President Obama, weighed in on the discussion and the senior officer became louder and more outspoken about the situation. His comments ranged from, the kid was a thug, "they" need to raise their children better, "they" need to stop dressing like thugs. I had enough and asked what he meant by "they?" He looked at me, paused, and said, "well, you are different, you are one of the good ones..."

Overt bigotry: During initial MOS training after TBS I had two incidents with one fellow Caucasian Marine officer. The first was on a very cold day around 5 degrees during a field exercise with 15 Marine Officers and were all were inappropriately dressed for the weather due to issues with supply. We all had on Cammie's and at best a sweatshirt, gloves, and beanies. Everyone was shivering. The one Marine Officer singled me out amongst all 15 of us and said, "Hey, I know you colored guys don't like the cold weather." I responded that "colored" is no longer an acceptable term and no one out here likes the cold weather when you aren't appropriately dressed. The second occasion with the same Marine Officer occurred shortly after when we aware all at a social function together. A hip-hop song came on and everyone was trying to figure out who the artist was who performed the song. The officer from the previous run-in said to ask me "because that's the only shitty music blacks listen to and he has to know." We had some words following this since it was the second occurrence the he made a bigoted comment in my presence.

Those are just a few personal experiences I just shared. Like I said I don't believe the Corps condones racism and bigotry but has a problem with Diversity. Even though the Corps stood up a diversity task force I do not believe it was very effective. While the Corps stood up a task force talking about diversity a majority of Caucasian Marine officers, to include ones in Recruiting command, made similar comments of "this diversity thing is stupid, the best Marine needs to be picked for the job regardless of race." Think that type attitude is almost a shadow narrative that is counter to what the Corps is looking for and this leads to comments and situations that I shared in this paper. As an example, the discussion of the diversity was so polarizing that it was rebranded as "talent management" by HQMC to try a different narrative to a similar problem. I only bring this up because as I progressed through the ranks I attempted to have these difficult conversations with many of my peers so they understood that some of their "diverse" Marines

have unique challenges they were not aware of. I've had varying levels of success but typically my Caucasian Marine officer peers do not want to engage in these conversations and default to the "best Marine for the job line." (28)

The second statement is from a black male Marine, who is currently a student at the Naval Postgraduate School. He speaks of an incident that took place on social media between him and other Marine officers. Although he acknowledges that the actions during this incident are overt in nature, this Marine leader has inevitably displayed unconscious racial bias in order to have progress to the level of success that he has. Major Joseph Commons provided this statement and granted permission to identify him:

Approximately 3 years ago, I encountered a situation in the Marine Corps that I had hoped I would never be faced with. Before I talk about the situation, it's important to have a little background information about me. I am the first person in my family to go directly from high school to college and subsequently the first person in my family to graduate college. As such, my family had a desired path that they wanted me to follow and it did not include joining the Marine Corps. When I told my family I was joining the Marine Corps, they repeatedly told me that the Marine Corps was the most racist branch in the military and I would not be accepted. I refused to believe that the institution that they described could possibly be the institution that existed in 2003, therefore I made the decision to start my training to become a Marine Officer.

Throughout the last 14 years, for the most part I've been exposed to a Marine Corps that has embraced differences and treated each service member as equals, until three years ago. Three years ago a peer of mine made the decision to post racist and hateful material on his Facebook page about African-Americans, then President Obama, and African-American Marines. The thoughts of racism that my family had described to me years prior raced to my mind. In disbelief, I read the Marine Officer's Facebook post as he attempted to degrade and dehumanize his fellow service members. Not only were the messages made public for me and another African-American Marine Officer he targeted, it was made available to his subordinates, peers and anyone with access to his page to view.

The thoughts of a Marine Officer behaving in a manner contrary to our Corps values was disturbing. It was disturbing, because at that moment, I knew there were Marines that served under his charge that were not getting fair and equal treatment. I knew at that moment, I had a decision to make. I could either ignore his post and allow the Marine to taint our officer and enlisted Corps, or stand-up to this Marine and expose him for what he was; a racist.

The morning following the Facebook incident I made the decision to report the Marine Officer and requested MAST to the I MEF Commanding General. The Marine Officer received non-judicial punishment and was separated from the Marine Corps via a board of inquiry.

Although my family thought at the time I was making the wrong decision by joining the Marine Corps, the way in which the Marine Corps handled this situation, reinforced the decision I made 14 years ago. What my family didn't understand is that we will rarely change an institution from the outside, change occurs from credible hardworking individuals on the inside. The Marine Corps is not a perfect institution as it is filled with imperfect beings, however I feel most Marines believe and try to embody our Corps Values.

This statement by Major Joe Commons was reviewed by the Marine Corps University Legal staff. It was approved for inclusion in this paper because it was obtained from publicly accessible social media. The author chose to conceal the name of the offending party as he has already moved on from this issue. The entire Facebook post is available upon request.

The final statement the author highlights comes from Major Jonathan Hutchison. He is a Marine who serves the Marine Corps as a Naval Aviator in the F-18 aircraft. He is a white male, a husband and father of two young children. He is a combat veteran who epitomizes what most people think of when they think of a Marine. His statement also epitomizes what people think of the Marine Corps. Here is what he relayed regarding his experiences.

I have been a Marine officer for fifteen years and in my experience, race relations in the USMC are an example for society to emulate. The Marine Corps is centered around teamwork and the belief that the whole team is greater than the sum of the individuals. My experience is that Marines are focused on mission accomplishment and not the color of a Marine's skin. During my career, I have been fortunate enough to have had several leadership opportunities and race was never an issue. As a platoon commander in Afghanistan, my unit operated in the British AO. This leadership opportunity taught me many valuable lessons and provided the opportunity to analyze our institution's core values compared directly to other military organizations. For over two hundred years, Nepalese soldiers called Gurkhas have served in the British armed forces. The discrimination of Gurkhas by the British military includes unequal pay, restrictions of promotions, and the inability for Gurkhas to become permanent British citizens. These discriminations are due to an existing colonial era belief by the British military that the Gurkhas are

a “martial race”. Throughout the deployment, I observed Marines and British soldiers discussing race relations. One of the first observations Marines would make was the demeaning treatment of Gurkha soldiers and how it undermined mission accomplishment. Additionally, Marines quickly identified this behavior as being incompatible with our core values. During these discussions, SNCOs and young officers often used the Marine Corps as an example of how diversity of individuals creates a unit capable of accomplishing any mission on the complex battlefield of the 21st century. The background on the relationship between the Gurkhas and the British military is provided not to pass judgment on the British military but to provide an example of race relations in the USMC. While the race relations in the United States Marine Corps are not perfect, my personal experience assures me that they serve as another military contribution to society that would improve society’s moral and ethical behavior.

His statement illustrates what is good about the race relations in the Marine Corps. He acknowledges that it not perfect. He understands it needs improvement but he also understands that the teamwork displayed by Marines dedicated to the mission and to each other can serve as an example for others to follow.