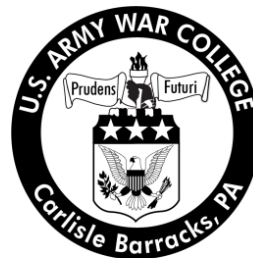


Civilian Research Project USAWC Fellow

Achieving Army Senior Leader Racial/Ethnic Balance: A Long Term Approach

by

Colonel Stephen G. Smith
United States Army



United States Army War College
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Abstract

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The Army must adjust to racial/ethnic demographic trends or risk losing the support of the American people and the nation's political institutions. By adjusting to these demographic trends, the Army will also benefit from the differing perspectives and skills people from diverse backgrounds offer as part of the organization. The Army's current recruiting, development, and retention systems do not provide for a continuing stream of senior leaders who mirror the racial/ethnic characteristics of the nation. Our senior political leaders have taken notice as evidenced by findings and requirements in recent National Defense Authorization Acts. While Army senior leadership has taken steps to address the challenges, the Army is still not on glide path to accommodate new demographic realities. There are several ways which the Army can immediately begin to adjust to these trends including establishing a long term objective to achieve racial/ethnic representation, reorganizing its diversity and inclusion staff, reaching out to establish non-traditional partnerships, and refining its current counseling, coaching and mentoring framework. Failure to adjust to demographic trends could result in loss of support and reduced influence as a national institution.

Achieving Army Senior Leader Racial/Ethnic Balance: A Long Term Approach

For the first time since the U.S. Army began keeping demographic statistics on its Brigadier General selection board, 100 percent of the colonels selected for promotion on its most recently released Brigadier General Active Component Category Selection Board were non-Hispanic white males. This comes at a time when the racial/ethnic diversification of American society is changing at its most rapid pace in history. To demonstrate the rapidity of this change, it's appropriate to note that the "new minorities - - Hispanics, Asians, and other groups apart from whites, blacks and American Indians -- account for *all* of the growth among the nation's child population. From 2000 to 2010, the population of white children declined by 4.3 million, while the population of Hispanic and Asian children grew by 5.5 million".¹ The Army must proactively and deliberately adjust to this new demographic reality and not assume that a natural course of events will solve its challenge. An Army with senior leaders whose racial and ethnic characteristics do not reflect the characteristics of the population it serves may lose the support of the people it is called upon to protect as well as the leadership of the country's governing institutions and risks diminished influence as a national institution.² The U.S. Army's recruiting, development, retention, and closed officer personnel systems have not accommodated the pace and scope of racial/ethnic change in the United States and are primary reasons our senior leaders – colonels and general officers – do not better mirror the racial and ethnic demographics of today's United States population. If we are to fully take into account the accelerating diversification of American society, the Army must immediately explore and implement new ways to recruit, develop, and retain America's best talent in order to attract and advance its most highly qualified officers from all types of backgrounds. Many of the challenges outlined

in this research are applicable to women as well; however, there are additional challenges on the topic of women in the Army that are not the subject of this analysis. A separate research paper will be necessary to address the specific concerns of female officers as historic changes and opportunities for women have recently occurred in the Army.

In addressing the racial/ethnic challenges in the Army's officer corps and specifically in its senior ranks, the Army must consider several factors which call for it to act now with a great sense of urgency: *We face an environment of constrained resources for the foreseeable future; competition for minority professionals is increasing; Congress is becoming increasingly diverse; and, the amount of time to produce a senior leader is a significant constraint.*

• **Environment of constrained resources:** We face a current and projected environment of constrained resources which means a smaller Army and decreased promotion rates. Promotion percentages to all officer ranks, especially senior ranks, decreased over the last two years in anticipation of an Army of decreased size. From 2001 through 2010, selection for advancement to colonel in the Army Competitive Category (Primary Zone) averaged 54 percent.³ In 2011 it was 36.4 percent and in 2012 it was 37.7 percent.⁴ While it is assumed that the promotion board processes are fair and consistently meet the needs of the Army, it is worthy to note that the overall selection rate to colonel among minority officers during these two respective boards was less than that of their white counterparts. In 2012, 40 percent of the eligible white population in the Active Component Category (Primary Zone) was selected to colonel compared to 27 percent of the eligible minority population.⁵ In 2011, 38 percent of the

eligible white population in the Primary Zone was selected for colonel compared to 30 percent of the minority population.⁶ If these trends continue, the Army's flexibility to promote demographically representative officers to its most senior ranks will continue to decline at the same time the racial/ethnic diversification of the nation is rapidly increasing. This will further exacerbate the already pronounced diversification challenge within future cohorts of Army senior leaders.

• **Competition for hiring minority professionals:** There is increasing competition to hire minority professionals from private, government, and non-profit sectors which, like us, are seeking to adjust to the new demographic realities. Since the private sector employs over 83% of the nation's workforce and has the greatest flexibility in hiring individuals, it is appropriate for the purpose of this research to primarily focus on the competition from this sector.⁷ Many of the nation's most successful private sector companies anticipated the country's demographic shift and are adapting their recruiting, development, and retention systems to fully take advantage of these racial/ethnic trends. Leading companies, such as Walmart, have recognized that diversity strengthens their organizations and have accordingly developed creative resources and applied institutional training to improve their stream of diverse managers and senior leaders.⁸ Walmart, one of the world's largest corporations with a national workforce nearly three times the size of the Army's Active Component force, highlighted in its 2011 Diversity and Inclusion report (*Accelerating OUR Diversity and Inclusion Journey*) the significant progress and ongoing diversity initiatives they have recently made. The company's earned recognition from independent diversity centered organizations (as listed below) demonstrates the increasing level of attention and

competition that is prevalent in the current diversity environment in which the Army is operating:

- 50 Out Front Companies: Best Places for Diverse Managers to Work (Diversity MBA Magazine)
- Top 25 Public Company Diversity and Inclusion Leaders (Racing Toward Diversity Magazine)
- Top Companies for Diversity and Inclusion (UPTOWN Professional Magazine)
- Top 50 Employers for African Americans (Black EOE Journal)
- Top 40 Companies for Diversity (Black Enterprise Magazine)
- Top 50 Companies for Latinas to Work (LATINA Style magazine)⁹

The partnerships Walmart has established with leading minority group organizations such as the African American Associate Resource Group (Unity), the Asian Pacific Associates Network, the Associates for Disability Awareness and Education, the Hispanic Latino Association Resource Group, and the Tribal Voices organization have also facilitated rapid improvement to their recruitment, professional development, and retention efforts and serve as an example of a creative approach the Army could mirror in its racial/ethnic diversity efforts to be discussed later in this research.¹⁰ Further exemplifying competition from private sector companies for talented leaders, it is worthy to note that Walmart is also a nationally recognized leader in hiring of military veterans through its “Careers With a Mission” program.¹¹ While this is good for our veterans seeking employment in a weak economy, these efforts and efforts of other corporations assertively adjusting to demographic realities, pose an additional

strain on the Army's retention of its best and brightest leaders, specifically its minority officers, during a time of decreased promotion rates.

- **An increasingly diverse United States Congress:** Our effectiveness in advising elected and other senior government officials who are increasingly representative of a diverse national population will depend upon the value we place on increasing diversity in our senior ranks. The 113th Congress is the most racially and ethnically diverse Congress in our history.¹² For the first time, one of the caucuses (the Democrats in the House of Representatives) does not have a majority of white men. Since congressional elections occur every two years, it is reasonable to infer that the diversification of Capital Hill (and its respective committees such as the Senate and House Armed Services Committees) will refresh at a much faster rate than that of the Army's closed personnel system as it is structured now. This increasing racial/ethnic disparity between the Army and our nation's governing body potentially jeopardizes our ability to effectively interface with the leaders of our governing institutions at the strategic level.

- **The timeline to produce a senior leader:** We must include in our calculus the decades it takes to produce a senior leader in the Army. The racial and ethnic diversity of officers at accession directly correlates to the demographics of future senior leader cohorts. The desired time to produce a COL in the Army is 22 years (plus/minus a year) and the average time it takes to produce a Brigadier General is 26 years.¹³¹⁴ Every year we delay making significant changes to the way we recruit, develop, and retain officers, we add a year to an already major challenge of achieving reasonable racial/ethnic balance.

The above factors taken as a whole directly (and potentially adversely) influence our racial/ethnic representation challenges within our senior ranks and demand that the Army act now. These challenges already have the attention of our senior elected leadership. In 2009, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) established the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) that published its report in 2011 titled “From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st-Century Military”. This report outlined the phenomenal efforts by the Armed Forces to increase diversity over the previous 60 years, but also highlighted that the “Armed Forces have not yet succeeded in developing a continuing stream of diverse leaders who are as demographically diverse as the Nation they serve”.¹⁵ It made 20 specific, well researched recommendations for the Armed Forces to continue to accommodate an even more diverse U.S. population. This article takes into account the Army’s current incorporation of the MLDC’s findings, specifically Recommendation # 7: “DoD and the Services should engage in activities to improve recruiting from the currently available pool of qualified candidates” and makes additional suggestions to further reinforce our efforts to comply with these findings. Most recently, the 2013 NDAA signed by the President in January, requires the Secretary of Defense to “plan to achieve military leadership reflecting the diversity of United States population” and formally requires the Armed Forces to report on their diversity progress to Congress annually through 2017.¹⁶

The senior civilian and military leadership within the Army has acknowledged the importance of diversification. In 2008 the Army established the Diversity and Leadership Directorate under the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower & Reserve Affairs – Diversify & Leadership (ASA M&RA (DL)). In 2010, the Secretary,

Chief of Staff and Sergeant Major of the Army signed the Army Diversity Roadmap which outlined specific goals and objectives for the Army. In February 2013, the Army published two diversity related goals in the Army Strategic Planning Guidance as quoted below.

- *Develop Courses of Action to Deal With Long-Term Demographic Trends in the United States.* “Recruiting and developing leaders to meet the challenges of the 21st century will prove difficult if the Army does not account for changing U.S. demographics. Trends such as advancements in technological proficiency, increasing obesity, economic challenges and a reduced interest in military service may cause some of the best and brightest candidates to avoid Army service. Army recruitment objectives should include capturing the diverse cultural attributes of the evolving population and developing programs and policies to incorporate long-term demographic trends within its ranks.”¹⁷
- *Maintain an Army That Embraces and Leverages the Diversity of Soldiers and Civilians.* “The Army must continue to recruit from the Nation’s diverse communities. A diverse force provides a competitive advantage in fighting and winning the Nation’s wars and enhances our capacity to operate globally with a culturally adept force. The Army will also prioritize professional development programs that enable leaders to maintain environments of trust and respect that are inclusive of Soldiers, Civilians and Families from diverse backgrounds, enhancing its ability to inspire, retain and leverage the whole Army and its strengths.”¹⁸

While these are noteworthy actions and necessary steps to address the challenges ahead, they have not put us on trajectory to achieve a balance of racial/ethnic diversity in our senior ranks which parallels the projected pace and scope of change in the United States. This is best demonstrated by comparing the most recent national demographic data and projections against two current Army data points:

1. The diversity demographics of our current group of Active Component senior leaders,
- and, 2. The diversity demographics of our most recent cohort of newly commissioned Active Component officers (Year Group 2012).

1. At the time of the 2010 census, non-Hispanic whites were 63.7 percent of the population; thus, minority group members were 36.3 percent of the population.¹⁹ The Army's current population of colonels is 18 percent minority and the current population of general officers is 12.9 percent minority.^{20 21}

2. According to U.S. Census Population Projections made in 2012, by 2040, minorities will be 45.8 percent of the population.²² Many demographers are projecting that non-Hispanic white Americans will be in the minority by the year 2043. Analyzing the most recent cohort of Army Officers, 24.6 percent of Year Group 2012 Second Lieutenants are minorities.²³ While this is somewhat closer to the 2010 overall national demographic composition of 36.3 percent of Americans who are African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, and Asian Pacific Islander, it is roughly half of the 2040 demographic projection, which is the time frame when this cohort of officers will represent our most senior colonels and newly selected brigadier generals. Extrapolating further into the future, if today's projections prove true and by 2043 non-Hispanic white Americans will be in the minority, the senior leadership of our Army at

that time could be around 80% non-Hispanic white when the national population is around 49% non-Hispanic white. And, this assumes the best case scenarios of future retention and promotion rates along current racial/ethnic representation which, if racial/ethnic promotion rates to colonel and brigadier general continue along historical trends, will not be the case.

As the Army modernizes, we must take four immediate steps to institutionalize and energize our racial/ethnic diversity efforts: *Establish and communicate a long term goal; properly organize and resource to meet that goal; reach out to establish broader partnerships; and, deliberately integrate racial/ethnic diversity principles into the Army's established Counseling, Coaching and Mentoring framework.*

Establish a long term goal to increase diversity, and communicate the goal continually: There is no short term, simple solution to this challenge. We should not completely force diversification at senior levels in the short term through selection and promotion quotas, potentially risking a threat to mission accomplishment in the long term. Primary selection criteria for promotion to senior leadership ranks in the Army should remain a candidate's demonstrated ability to serve at the strategic level in a complex operating environment. Additionally, assuming that the United States will not become engaged in a large scale and protracted war in the very near future, we should not consider lateral entry into Army senior leadership positions as a part of our equation to solve this challenge in the short term.

Conversely, we cannot neglect our long term responsibility to increase racial/ethnic diversity among our senior ranks by only focusing on mission accomplishment in the short term. Not only would this fail to achieve the necessary

racial/ethnic balance required to maintain support of the American public and of our political institutions, it would likewise potentially weaken the competency of our senior leadership by not embracing the many strengths of diversity as previously stated. While we should give more consideration to racial/ethnic selection rates during senior officer promotion boards in the near future, we must primarily pursue a balanced, comprehensive, and long term approach focused on the root causes of our racial/ethnic disparities in our officer corps at all ranks.

Our timetable is this: In addition to the time it takes to develop and implement new strategies, we should assume approximately 26 years to produce a colonel (from freshman cadet). Thus, our goal is set for the year 2040. This provides sufficient time to increase diversity among our officer corps through changes in our recruitment, development, and retention systems so that our junior colonels at that time will reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic mix of the U.S. population. While working towards this goal, we need to simultaneously increase awareness and commitment to the Army Diversity Roadmap by having dialogue at all levels of Army leadership centered on the document. This is an Army-wide effort which can no longer just be left to commands responsible for recruiting officers. To achieve synergy, Army leaders at all levels must understand the scope of the issue and embrace the mission, vision and goals set in the Army Diversity Roadmap. Additionally, in a deliberate and transparent effort to stay on glide path to achieve racial and ethnic balance by 2040, an annual report would be appropriate to communicate our diversity achievements and initiatives to all stakeholders internal and external to the Army.

Properly organize and resource for the long term effort: The Army should structure, resource, and empower its diversity and inclusion staff commensurate to the complexity, depth, and breadth of the long term challenge as outlined in the Army Diversity Roadmap. In addition to the vast amounts of evolving data and information about national demographic trends, the Army's new requirement to formally report its diversity efforts as required by the FY13 NDAA demands proper resourcing. This enhanced diversity and inclusion staff should form a directorate in the Headquarters, Department of the Army, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (G1). By reporting through the G1, this staff can better help the Army's senior military leadership manage its diversity efforts (e.g. officer recruiting, assignment, advancement; training & education; etc) by more efficiently working with commands and directorates currently responsible for personnel management such as the Human Resources Command, the Military Personnel Management Directorate and the Human Resources Policy Directorate. As it is now, the Army's diversity staff residing under the ASA M&RA (D&L) effectively consists of two people. This is a critical shortcoming of the Army's diversity effort. A staff of this size cannot adequately analyze the MLDC report, develop and track metrics, recommend programmatic changes to Army leadership, reach out to private and not-for-profit organizations for best practices, and adequately report to Congress in addition to many other critical tasks. Resolving this challenge will take collective action and cooperation of many commands, directorates, subject matter experts and civilian institutions, all of which should have full or part time representation on the core diversity and inclusion staff. Example organizations and expertise include but are not limited to the U.S. Army Cadet Command; West Point, Army Training and

Doctrine Command; Army Human Resources Command; the Army Senior Leader Development Office; the Headquarters, Department of the Army agency for Plans and Operations (G 3/5/7), demographers, Army Operational Research and Systems Analysts, Army Strategic Planners, and civilian representatives from selected minority-focused research institutes. As possible benchmarks for the structure and organization of a re-organized Army diversity and inclusion staff, the Army should look at the staff organizations and functions of the most successful private sector companies and those of our sister military services.

Reach out to establish broader partnerships: In embracing new and creative approaches to its recruiting, development, and retention systems, the Army should reach out to minority focused organizations similar to the private sector efforts stated previously. This effort should include seeking assistance to increase representation of all underrepresented minority groups in the Army's officer corps and especially our most underrepresented minority group, Hispanic officers. Hispanics comprise 15.7 percent of the nation's college students including 13 percent of four year college students but represent only 7.9 percent of the Year Group 2012 cohort of Army 2LTs, 3 percent of Active Component colonels and .84 percent of its general officers.^{24 25 26 27}

These broader partnerships should take the form of both formal and informal relationships and agreements with minority focused research institutes (i.e. think tanks) and an increased U.S. Army War College (USAWC) fellowship presence to these organizations. Additionally, the Army should consider establishing fellowships at two year colleges with large enrollment percentages of minority students. These broader partnerships are further described below:

- *Army partnerships with minority-focused research institutes and increased USAWC presence:* Similar to the partnerships formed by the private sector discussed earlier in this research, the Army's diversity and inclusion staff should partner formally and/or informally with the nation's most influential and nationally recognized minority focused think tanks to take advantage of their decades of research in diversity issues, their subject matter expertise, and their extensive networks at local, state and national levels. Moreover, we should increase USAWC fellowship presence at some of these think tanks and align the formal USAWC mentorship structure of these respective fellows with the Army's diversity and inclusion staff, currently under the ASA M&RA (DL). Of the Army's 90 War College Fellowships, only one is currently assigned to a minority focused research institute. At a minimum, this one diversity focused fellowship opportunity at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (a research institute focused on issues affecting African Americans and other people of color) should be designated as a post Military Education Level 1 fellowship opportunity and awarded to a colonel that is highly competitive for promotion to brigadier general. Additionally, the Army should immediately assign a fellow to an established and respected Hispanic think tank as part of a concerted effort to rapidly study and implement ways to increase Hispanic representation in our officer corps.
- *Consider USAWC Fellowship representation at two year colleges:* Currently, the Army provides 61 USAWC fellows to 24 four year colleges and university programs across the country. We should consider reallocating a limited

number of these fellowships to targeted two year institutions which have high enrollment percentages of minority students who go on to pursue four year degrees, specifically Hispanic students (our most underrepresented minority group in the officer corps). This would augment the MLDC's recommendation to explore reaching out to two year colleges based on its findings that over 60% of Hispanics attending college went to two year colleges with 19% of this group transferring to four year colleges.²⁸ Establishing representation to these targeted two year universities would serve the dual purpose of broadening the experience of the selected Army senior leader(s) while simultaneously increasing awareness about our nation's Army within the host academic institution's student body and staff.

Improve officer racial/ethnic understanding and development through counseling, coaching and mentoring: According to Army leadership principles, Army leaders have three ways to develop others and improve retention. They can provide knowledge and performance feedback by counseling, coaching, and mentoring. Using the Army's capstone document for leadership to briefly describe these terms – *Counseling* is the process used by leaders to guide subordinates to improve performance and develop their potential; *Coaching* refers to the developmental function of helping someone through a set of tasks or with general qualities. Part of coaching includes eliminating barriers for development; *Mentorship* is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect. Feedback through counseling, coaching and mentoring significantly contributes to

career development and translates into improved leader performance.²⁹ However, a recent doctoral thesis based on detailed interviews of 22 Army officers of all races/ethnicities spanning the ranks from lieutenant colonel to concluded that differences such as race, ethnicity, and culture are often significant barriers to the availability of mentorship and other forms of career guidance during an officer's career.³⁰ Furthermore, this thesis found that these barriers may result because individual officers generally prefer to engage in mentoring relationships with officers of the same race/ethnicity.³¹ Assuming the overall fairness of the Army's promotion system, this cross-race mentorship shortfall may facilitate the perpetuation of hidden biases within the Army due to an unintentional lack of leader commitment to career development and feedback through counseling, coaching, and mentoring by officers representative of the racial/ethnic majority group to officers representative of racial/ethnic minority groups. Stated plainly, this shortfall could be a contributing factor to the smaller promotion rates among minority officers and contribute to the imbalance of racial/ethnic representation among our senior leaders. We should consider requiring senior officers of one race/ethnicity to counsel, coach, and perhaps mentor junior officers of another race/ethnicity on a regular basis. This should not take away from an officer's ability to personally seek informal mentoring relationships with respected individuals of their choice as currently described in current Army doctrine; however, it could augment that process by formally institutionalizing and improving the ability to perform these critical leadership tasks across all races and ethnicities.

Our Army is the strength of our Nation. As such, our senior leaders should adequately reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the United States to ensure continued

support of the population we defend as well as support of our nation's political institutions. Our society is rapidly changing, and in order for our Army keep pace, we must begin making comprehensive and enduring changes in our officer recruiting, development, and retention systems.

Endnotes

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