[Racial Conflict in the U.S. Army](https://doctorbillgould.com/race-racial-conflict-in-the-u-s-army/)

WILLIAM STUART GOULD is doing graduate studies in Vietnamese and Chinese at Harvard University. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the examiners of the Social and Political Sciences Tripos (1972) at Cambridge University.

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WILLIAM STUART GOULD

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the past twenty-five years a general re-evaluation of United States Army policy toward the Negro or Black soldier has taken place. During the period immediately following the Second World War until late 1968, Army policy was directed almost exclusively toward integrating the Black soldier into the existing structure of the military institution. The central goal of this policy was to provide the individual Negro soldier with an equal opportunity to compete with White peers for valued socially prescribed ends. Further, this competition was to take place in a completely racially mixed military setting.

The recent form of this policy of integration was developed as a result of the work of a number of Presidential and other high level committees. After full integration of the Negro soldier into previously all-White units was completed in 1954, the emphasis focused on ensuring non-discriminatory treatment for Black soldiers on and off base. This was especially evident during the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson when civil rights acts passed in Congress were immediately applied to the situation of Black soldiers on military duty.

The policy of integration in the Army has been one that has sought to ensure equal treatment for the Negro soldier. The questions with which the balance of this paper will deal concern the effectiveness of this policy of racial integration in the United States Army. The focal point of this analysis will be the period roughly between late 1968 and early 1972.

THE POLICY OF INTEGRATION

The formulators of Army policy concerning the Negro soldier expected certain results through the implementation of the policy of integration. One of these aims, whether explicitly stated or not, was to ensure that internal racial conflict was kept at a tolerable level for the Army commanders. Naturally, a high incidence of racially inspired conflict would pose a threat to the capacity of the Army to carry out its highly specific institutional goals. Therefore, if the incidence of racially inspired conflict showed a marked increase and reached an intolerable level, serious questions could be raised concerning the adequacy of measures taken by the Army to curb such conflict. Two questions will be posed here to facilitate the analysis of the policy of integration. First, has there been an increase in racially inspired conflict during the past four years; and, if so, what levels of intensity has it reached?

The second question seeks to find the source of this conflict, and why existing policy has not been able to curb it. Thus, if racial conflict has increased, has it resulted from an inadequate policy of race relations, poor enforcement of that policy, or has the policy itself ignored certain features of the racial situation?

An insight into the answer to the first question lies in the fact that the United States military has experienced in the first eight months of 1971 ’18 race riots that required what was termed significant police action.’ Further, recent ominous signs of a potentially explosive racial situation combined with complaints of racial inequalities in the Army have led a number of public and private organisations to involve themselves in the investigation of this situation. The list of organisations involved includes the Department of Defense; the NAACP; groups of congressional leaders; and major United States and international newspapers and journals. The results point up conditions far more volatile that had been expected.

In December 1970 a Pentagon task force reported that: Black frustration and anger has reached a dangerous level among United States troops in Europe.

We did not anticipate finding such acute frustration and such volatile anger as we found among the blacks nor did we expect to find a somewhat lower level of frustration which was clearly evidenced by young whites.

The blacks angrily told us that they had no reason to be fighting in a white man’s Army and in a white man’s war. Blacks were quoted as saying their place was back in the States . . . where they could fight to liberate and free their black brothers and sisters.

In Vietnam, another Department of Defense team found ‘black GIs so swollen with frustration that they had trouble even expressing themselves about problems. ‘3 In a newspaper series entitled the ‘Army in Anguish’, The Washington Post found ‘the predominant viewpoint of officers and NCOs is that there are no longer safe firebreaks between black militancy, violence and drugs. They are all mixed together in an explosive combination.

A black ex-serviceman, now a university student, testified before a Congressional hearing that ‘the level of intensity and potential for violence has been heightened in recent years, and that groups of blacks and radical white soldiers “are poised and ready to raise the level of the struggle to a defensive violent stand.” ‘s Finally, even in forces based in the United States there were clear indications of a serious social unrest. In November 1971 seven black army officers from Fort Devens, Massachusetts, in a joint statement . . . stated that they were ‘not revolutionaries, militants, dissidents nor anarchists. However, we are concerned black officers that want to see a change in the institutional racism that has wrapped itself around the military system. We sit before you today because time is running

These reports were in sharp contrast to the findings published by military sociologist Charles Moscos in 1966. After extensive research he reported, ‘In their performance of military duties, whites and Negroes work together with little display of racial tension. This is not to say racial animosity is absent in the military. Racial incidents do occur, but these are reduced by the severe sanctions imposed by the military for such acts. In no sense, however, is the military sitting on top of a racial volcano.’

Thus, there is evidence to suggest that to some extent the state of racial unrest in 1970 and 1971 had reached an almost intolerable level. Further, from the research conducted by Professor Moscos, and from recent reports, it appeared that the situation had worsened since 1966.

The answer to the second question, that seeks to locate the source of these racial tensions is a complex one. Attaching responsibility to the civilian community for all internal racial tensions, as is often done by career soldiers, is shortsighted. There are, however, a convincing array of socially and culturally rooted influences, to which pre-inducted ghetto Blacks are exposed, that are incompatible with the dynamics of the Army situation as defined by official regulations and the attitudes of those in authority positions.

The economic, educational and cultural relationships of the urban Negro setting do have a profound effect upon the Black soldier. For example, the results of long term poverty and unemployment in the ghetto, among other factors, have led cultural anthropologists to claim that the Negro does not share the future-time orientation of his White counterpart.8 Miller and Riesman report that it is perhaps inappropriate to consider the concept of deferred gratification when analysing the social relationships of ghetto residents.9 This may have a profound effect upon the Black soldier’s commitment to goals that motivate many White soldiers. The non-career-oriented American soldier who plans to return to civilian life after two or three years is motivated to follow constraining Army regulations by a host of factors. Certainly, a fundamental belief in the legitimacy of the authority structure is a prerequisite.

However, there are other factors. As one example, the enticement of an ‘Honorable Discharge’ is important. The ‘Honorable Discharge’ has been a traditional prerequisite for access to valued civilian occupations, and valued status positions in the civilian community. Since the Honorable Discharge is awarded at the end of a soldier’s enlistment, and only for a satisfactory total service record, a long-term commitment on the part of the soldier to a deferred reward is implied. Given a relatively high present-time orientation, and a bleak future in the civilian job market, regardless of type of discharge earned, the Negro soldier from a ghetto setting may not be motivated by the ends that motivate the White soldier. This may be one element in understanding why over 45 per cent of the less than ‘Honorable Discharges’ awarded in 1970 were given to Blacks.’ ° Given that far less than 15 per cent of the soldiers in the Army are Negro, this number is indicative of a serious problem, perhaps of motivation.’

Further, sociological studies indicate that there are great pressures on urban Blacks from peers as well as from advertising directed toward Negroes to possess material ‘status’ items such as expensive cars and jewelry. This may serve to explain, in part, the popularity of ‘time purchase’ arrangements entered into by a great number of young Blacks. Given unemployment, poverty, and specific ghetto purchasing norms that preclude the prompt settlement of accounts, many young Negroes accumulate staggering debts to business organisations. Naturally, a youth who enters the Army remains responsible for the repayment of these debts. Further, Department of Defense policy requires that unit and higher level commanders assist legal private concerns in the settlement of outstanding accounts by urging indebted enlisted men to meet their financial obligations.

After sending numerous letters to the debtor, which normally elicit no response, further correspondence from a creditor is generally directed to the unit commander. There is, however, usually a reluctance on the part of the unit commander to coerce his soldiers in matters far removed from the combat or combat training situation in which they are involved. Thus, after further non-payment, subsequent letters are sent to higher level commanders who necessarily apply greater pressure, through the unit commander, to effect payment. The result of further pressure on the debtor is a high level of animosity between the parties involved. During one eight month period as a unit commander, this author dealt with approximately fifty ‘letters of indebtedness’, 75 per cent of them referring to young Black soldiers who accrued their debts before entering the Army.’ 2 The embarrassment and friction generated by these encounters was perceived by Blacks as a clear indication of overt racism. These sentiments were magnified greatly by primary group contacts at unit level, the implications of which will be discussed in later sections of this paper.

Another aspect of this present-time orientation may be a factor in the high rate of re-enlistment among Black soldiers as compared to White soldiers. As a result of the manpower needs, perhaps generated by the war in Vietnam, the Army has found it necessary to make first term re-enlistment attractive to large numbers of low-ranking soldiers by offering substantial re-enlistment pay bonuses. (Six year re-enlistment bonuses range from £500 to £4,000 depending upon military occupational specialty and rank of re-enlistee.) The result has been the voluntary retention of many Black soldiers who were motivated by the immediate gratification of a large bonus rather than devotion to the military as a career opportunity or even as a legitimate organisation. The accumulation of a large group of uncommitted Black soldiers (with long enlistment periods to serve before eligibility for discharge) has created for the Army a potentially explosive situation.

The implications of the relatively high present-time orientation of the Black soldiers presented here are only one result of ghetto poverty. Yet, this problem appears not to have been recognized during the formulation of official policy. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go further into this particular facet of the problem; however, the fundamental effects of educational deprivation, to be covered next, are inextricably linked to the poverty cycle in the ghetto.

The following Department of Defense data are derived from the results of the military intelligence test (GT) given to all candidates being considered for induction into the enlisted ranks of the Army. The results are used to select soldiers and place men into training schools for which they are thus deemed suitable. The results are also a major factor in determining future assignments. The achievement of poor results on this test has a considerable negative effect upon traditional avenues of in-service mobility available to the soldier.

Table 1. Results of Preinduction Intelligence Test by Race 1 3

G T Category      Draftees              Enlistees

Group   % Black % White               % Black % White

0.4          5.3          0.4          6.5

II             5.3          28.0        8.3          36.7

III            31.1        42.8        63.4        50.1

IV-V       63.2        23.9        27.9        6.7

 100.0     100.0     100.0     100.0

(Category I indicates the highest IQ group, category V the lowest.)

The Army will accept for induction those men whose scores lie in Category IV-V. Standard practice is to shunt these men into training for military occupational specialties that require no particular educational or intellectual abilities. The alternatives to specialized training are usually low level combat positions or low skill service occupational specialties. Clearly the soldier whose scores fall into Category IV-V has little chance of being considered for officer candidate school.

As an example, official policy at certain Army posts in 1970 stated that those soldiers whose GT scores fell into Category TV-V and a portion of Category III, were ineligible to attend the Non- Commissioned Officer (NCO) Academy.14 Successful completion of this course was a prerequisite for enlisted promotions to higher NCO grades (i.e., to attain the rank of middle and high level sergeant.) At one point, on the basis of these test scores, this author was unable to nominate seventeen of the twenty-nine Black soldiers under his command.1 5 Although this criterion could be waived for exceptional soldiers, the fact remained that the Black soldier was at a disadvantage as a result of pre-induction educational deprivation. Further, the policy of integration contained no provision to rectify this situation for low scoring entrants, the bulk of whom were Black.

Finally, to end the discussion of pre-induction influences, one specific aspect of the value structure of the ghetto will be examined. There is evidence that indicates a high status premium is placed on masculinity in the urban Negro setting. Walter B. Miller speaks of an intense concern over toughness, which ghetto dwellers perceive as an essential component of the male role.’

This is important for two reasons. First this is vital in understanding the high esteem in which returning combat veterans are held by pre-inducted Black peers. Black veterans frequently return to civilian life embittered by the inequities of military life and the inequalities to which they return in the civilian community. Such subjective, negative perspectives which these veterans employ in conversation with their pre-inducted peers in the ghetto may constitute significant anticipatory socialization for Black youths about to enter the Army. Many young Blacks thus come to the Army expecting and prepared for unequal treatment. The information upon which they base these expectations comes from a trusted and respected source. The second reason for discussing the core values of masculinity lies in its use in understanding the often belligerent character of members of a Black primary group in the Army when involved in relationships with incumbents of military authority positions. This, however, will be covered more fully in the next section.

Certain conclusions may be drawn from the foregoing discussion. First, the average Negro is at an economic and educational disadvantage when he enters the Army. This has future implications by limiting opportunities available to Black soldiers. Further, these often cause uncomfortable relations between officers and Black soldiers. Next, a Black from the ghetto is the product of a socialization process somewhat different from that of his White contemporary. While these differences may not be sufficient to define a completely separate Black culture, the expectations of Blacks in certain situations are clearly different from those of Whites. Thirdly, the pre-inducted Black is exposed to and influenced by the bitterness of peers who have recently returned from the nightmare of combat in Vietnam, and the racial inequities of active military service. Finally, the young Black is exposed to the militant rhetoric of Black Power leaders. This movement has legitimized, ‘charismatically’, values, goals and interests that challenge traditional patterns of authority, the implications of which are especially evident in military situations. Given the foregoing description of the effects of ghetto life on the Black soldier, it is clear that many of the racial problems encountered in the Army are products of the social conditions in the host society, i.e., the United States.

Racial Conflict at Unit Level’

This analysis will now consider the implications of the foregoing conditions as one source of racial conflict at unit level. First, the definition of the situation constructed by low-ranking Black soldiers will be examined by reference to specific complaints voiced by Negro soldiers to members of the investigation teams mentioned earlier. Only those complaints and situations that appeared repeatedly, and in all the reports, will be considered.

Next, using the concept of the primary group, an explanation will be posited as to why this particular situational construct is formed and why it is so irritating to all of the actors concerned. Reference will be made to certain elements of the ghetto value structure in order to integrate the foregoing macro-sociological perspective with this study of unit level group dynamics.

The word ‘unit’ refers to the company-sized combat organization. It usually consists of between 150 and 200 men; is commanded by a Captain (with three or four years’ military experience); four subordinate lieutenants (usually less than one year’s experience); approximately six high-ranking NCOs (10-20 years’ experience); twenty lower-ranking NCO5 (two to three years experience); and approximately 130 low- ranking soldiers.

All of the investigation teams reported basically the same findings. The International Herald Tribune reported on 16 August 1971 that ‘one of the key problems that both Mr. Laird and a number of civil rights organisations want tackled involves the large number of black GIs in comparison with whites who wind up facing military disciplinary action, court martial or bad conduct discharges.’ Another group reported ‘The extensive use of pre-trial confinement for Negro soldiers, the alarming degree to which non-judicial punishment is meted out to blacks and the ever-present problems of inequities in the promotion system.’i

Blacks were quoted by The Washington Post as saying that ‘the military justice system is discriminatory and unjust; that white ‘soldiers are not punished for behaviour which on the part of a black would result in swift criminal action that blacks are discriminated against in housing and promotions.’20 A Black major, an Army doctor, ‘complained that recent regulations aimed at ending housing discrimination against Black soldiers by German landlords had not been effective because they were too easy to circumvent.’1 This author found in the six housing establishments ‘he visited in 1967 that all refused to rent to black soldiers, but were willing to ‘backdate’ leases for white soldiers to a date before sanctions were made official.2 2

Another complaint lay in the fact that Black soldiers believe that neither Black nor White officials will assist them in complaints against White soldiers. One Negro soldier said: I had a black platoon leader – excuse me, I had a colored platoon leader – and everyone around him was white; the battalion commander, the company commander; so he was not about to help me..’2 3 The belief that help is not forthcoming to Blacks is manifested in the following incident: A major in Germany referred to the increase in reported aggravated assaults on the military installation and said, ‘the statistical trend is very obvious. It’s blacks assaulting whites and the blacks are in groups.’24 However, when confronted with these figures a Black soldier at the same military installation said: You got to consider something about those crime statistics . . . the brothers [metaphor of solidarity used by Blacks to refer to other Blacks.

Military justice is divided into two levels – judicial and non-judicial. Judicial action is basically the court proceedings and involves many of the due-process guarantees of the American judicial system. Non-judicial action concerns the administration of discipline at the company level.

*“got a lot of pride in a lot of things, see. If I went outside and three white guys jumped on me, I’m not going up there and tell the desk sergeant. I’m going home and get some brothers together and come back.*

*A white guy, if some brothers jump on him, now he is going to report it because all his life he has been used to running to the authorities – to the police. It a brother goes to the police, he knows it isn’t going to do anything for you noway. So what’s the use of going to him? The brothers don’t even bother with the police.”*

Finally, a major source of irritation amongst the Blacks was that there were ‘. . . no black girls in Germany to fool with. The German women won’t speak to you ’26 There are very few Negro Army women stationed outside the United States. Even in the U.S. Black women are stationed at a limited number of installations and then, only in small numbers.

The illustrations give some indication of the problems uncovered by the investigation teams. These attitudes, once formed, become the terms by which members of a Black primary group define their social situation. Given these attitudes, the next section describes the importance of the concept of the primary group in understanding racial frictions at unit level; i.e. how these racial tensions occur over seemingly minor incidents; how this friction brings about disciplinary action; and finally, how this serves to further aggravate racial tensions.

To launch this analysis, two questions will be posed, centered around the fact that the investigation teams consistently report that Whites find the clannishness of Blacks upsetting.2 ‘ First, why are Black soldiers so clannish, and, second, why is this so disconcerting to White soldiers, especially those in positions of authority?

In answer to the first question, Black soldiers do tend to seek the company of their Black peers at every possible opportunity; for example, in ‘five-minute break periods’, classrooms, and the dining hall. In short, they seek one another’s company anywhere the physical situation permits, even if this involves breaking minor regulations, as in meeting during manoeuvres. This situation is not difficult to understand. Once assigned to static combat or combat training units, soldiers, excluding isolates, tend to enter small, tight-knit groups that are characterized by the elements of a primary group. One would expect this to be the case in view of the fact that an Army is a massive bureaucratic organisation.

Black soldiers are especially drawn to highly cohesive and racially exclusive primary groups because they define the situation in which they find themselves as one in which they are at a distinct disadvantage as a result of their face. Along with the recent drive by Negro political leaders to ‘legitimize’ the Black life style, has come a change in the nature of the Negro soldier primary group. Black soldiers have clearly become more overt in their demands for an official recognition of a Black consciousness. One result is that prestige for the Black soldier has most recently become overtly measured and dispensed in terms of group cultural norms and values rather than those of the larger formal organisation. Further, physical and psychological closeness and constancy have made for group cohesion and the primary group has reinforced its highly specific norms and values.

An example of this is that Black soldiers of moderate political and social commitments have recently been physically and socially ‘coerced’ into actively supporting primary group norms and actions possibly at odds with personal values. Actual assaults, destruction of property, and even murder have been carried out against violators of norms. Instances with which the author is familiar concern Black non-commissioned officers of moderate or conservative social attitudes. The latter were frequently victims of motor car vandals, and often received threats communicated through telephone calls and letters.2 8 They were overtly and covertly warned by militant Black soldiers against ‘Uncle Tomming’.

It is important to note here that the Black NCO is only marginally attached to a Black soldier primary group. Many of these older, career-oriented Black NCOs are from rural areas and are motivated by different norms and values than are young Black soldiers socialized in urban settings. It is indeed difficult for these two groups to understand each other’s perspectives. This is especially so because the militant young Black is convinced that deference to group norms and values should automatically be effected on the basis of skin colour. On the other hand, the career-oriented Black NCO has reached a level of status that was not available to his father or to his civilian peers. Keenly aware of this, many Black NCOs defend the Army in spite of its obvious shortcomings. Pressures to conform naturally take place amongst soldiers of the same position in the authority hierarchy. At one post in the United States, immediately prior to a race riot in which 139 Black service personnel were arrested on 15 November 1971, ‘hair-pulling fistfights broke out in the WAC  (Women’s Army Corps) Clerical Training Company when moderate Blacks refused to join their more militant sisters in protest.

This discussion of primary group affiliations entered into by Black soldiers may be summarized as follows: ‘Social cohesion in primary groups, military and other, is affected by two sets of factors; the social background and personality of the group members; and the immediate social situation.’ From the information provided in the foregoing on both of these factors, one might expect to find highly cohesive and racially exclusive primary groups at unit level.

Clearly, the clannishness of Black soldiers is understandable. But why is it so irritating? First, when these groups form during duty hours and during off-duty periods, the major and minor antagonisms of military life are discussed, usually in the inflammatory, violent language characteristic of the ghetto. These statements and their attendant actions pose a real and serious threat to the immediate authority of the officer or NCO toward whom they are directed. Non-commissioned officers spend far greater time with the enlisted soldier than do officers. It is, therefore, the sergeant who generally hears, and is the object of these threats. NCOs are, at the same time, under constant pressure to accomplish standard military tasks set by superiors. Thus, if a sergeant’s authority is effectively challenged by a group under his supervision, his capacity to discharge his immediate obligations is severely limited. The NCO is constrained to react in a limited number of ways.

First, the traditional solution is to cause the offender to appear before the unit commander for punitive action. If the officer punishes the Black offender the solidarity of the latter’s primary group is enhanced. Given the recent breakdown in the perceived legitimacy of the Army authority structure that permitted situations like this to arise in the first place, increasing the cohesiveness of the Black primary group around a ’cause’ will probably precipitate further, more serious incidents, within hours.

On the other hand, if the officer merely reprimands but does not punish the offender in the traditional manner, the NCO and members of his primary group feel their authority, and thus their status, in jeopardy. The NCO may react by losing interest and requesting a transfer to an assignment in which he will be assured of the status to which he feels his rank entitles him and for which he has worked often for fifteen or twenty years.

Alternatively, the NCO may seek to resolve the situation by prodding and harassing the offender into compliance with official directives. The latter solution is an example of ineffective leadership technique. However, as it is the most readily available solution and the easiest to effect, it is more often than not the course of action taken.

Harassment is perceived by members of the Black primary group as a clear indication of racial prejudice. Once the primary group is committed to the belief that they are, as a group, the target of unfair practices, group members will make a concerted effort to antagonize the source of harassment. Since Blacks see little use in articulating grievances through normal channels, counter-harassment and physical retaliation are the only avenue of retribution open to them.

There is another aspect of the clannishness of Black soldiers that irritates those in authority positions. During the past four to five years, Black soldiers have developed a life style distinct from that prescribed by strict Army regulations. This includes, for example, a comprehensive style of dress while in military uniform, a distinctive swagger, the Black Power salute amongst peers in place of the traditional salute, and other less obvious facets. By virtue of the distinctiveness of this life style vis-a-vis the life style prescribed by Army regulations, the Black soldier has challenged the traditional structure in which the legitimacy of NCO and officer authority lie. Thus, this distinctive life style provides the Black soldier’s primary group with an internally legitimate prestige not available through traditional military means.

The Black soldier, is, however, often ordered to walk in a military fashion, to take off his pink sunglasses while in uniform, or to wear his military hat as prescribed by regulations. Since this poses a threat to the status his primary group affiliation has afforded him, these incidents are the basis of serious ‘racial’ friction. Again, although these antagonisms may appear minor, one must remember that ‘the unit is the total situation’, 3 1 and thus these frictions often lead to threats of violent revenge and disobedience of orders.

Commanders are eventually forced to contain the growing threats of violence and widespread disobedience. The only immediate means available when this point is reached is to confine the major offender or offenders in the stockade, lest the threat be carried out. To legitimize the confinement, official charges must be drawn up against the offender, and he therefore awaits court-martial in the stockade. This is defined as pre-trial confinement, and as noted previously, is a major source of discontent among Blacks according to the investigation teams.32 The fact that criminal charges have been drawn up also necessitates a military trial. The relatively high number of military trials undergone by Black soldiers has also been a source of discontent.

On the other hand, offences for which Whites are tried are usually not much more serious than AWOL (absent without leave). Since Whites are normally more committed to traditional (White) avenues of status attainment, they are not bound as cohesively to the primary groups as a source of prestige as are Black soldiers. Tied to this and other factors, there is less occasion for the White soldier to defend his masculinity through displays of toughness in front – of his peer audience. Thus, White soldiers are often perceived by commanders to be less violent and less likely to disobey orders than are Blacks, and are more often than not afforded normal privileges while awaiting trial.

The following data point up this over-proportion of Blacks in one particular stockade in Germany. The organisations for which this stockade exists are composed of far less than 20 per cent Black soldiers.

Table.2. Soldiers held in Pretrial Confinement, 1970

Average Number, Black and White           % Black held for any reason

July                      452         49

August                444         54

September         421         59

October              407         60

November          428         62

December          412         62

The above section describes the dynamics of apparently mundane situations that lead to tensions of an apparently racial nature. This framework, although far from satisfactory in explaining every situation of racial conflict, is, nevertheless, useful in understanding certain cases of intra-unit racial friction. As is evident above, racial tensions are often the produce of perceived and real inequities that are magnified by the physical proximity of the ‘opposed’ actors, and their incompatible definitions of the social situation.

Given an aroused Black consciousness in many Negroes, the attainment of total equality through integration has itself become a hollow promise. Because of this state of affairs, the Black soldier has recently taken a political initiative to supplement the more limited stand described in the preceding section.

III. A DEPARTURE FROM INTEGRATION

The following section deals with the politically-oriented tactics taken up by Black soldiers to come to terms with the situation of lingering inequality. Aware of the positive results of organization in the civilian community, Black soldiers have chosen to organise and to press high-ranking officers with demands for immediate reform of many policies. What has emerged is a heavy reliance upon interest articulation to group level rather than through traditional means which are built around the individual. The tactics centre around a drive to legitimize a separate Black identity.

Black soldiers clearly recognize the effectiveness of organized action. Before a Congressional hearing, an ex-soldier said the defensive violent stand taken by Blacks ‘is the result of frustration over attempts to end racism and the groups’ feeling that military officials will only act favourably “if we act as a group in an unfavorable manner.” The Pentagon heard ‘. . . from whites that blacks see racial prejudice where none exists; that they insist upon segregating themselves and that many have formed anti- white “black power” groups within the Army in Germany.’36

Black soldiers have organized to the degree that they now proliferate their plea for greater solidarity through ‘underground’ Black Power newspapers printed by and especially for Black servicemen. In Germany the groups that publish these newspapers have taken on significant names: The Unsatisfied Black Soldier, Black United Soldier, and Black Action Group. Black Power and radical White soldiers based in England print and distribute PEACE (People Emerging Against Corrupt Establishments). The theme is identical with those published in Germany, the United States, Korea and Vietnam. The most common rhetoric contends ‘there is but one end to racism and that is revolution. But first you need unity Black unity and Black revolution Every brother should have a gun and 50 rounds of ammunition… organize, get some unity and revolt against oppressive racism. Now is the time. It will be too late to organize when the Revolution comes.

An officer in Germany, when discussing the official attempts made to soothe Black tempers, said, ‘yet they continue to organise, and Vietnam veterans are often the most active here. “Just end racism” one private first class said, “and we’ll stop organizing.” ’38 Another young Black soldier commenting on the elimination of certain aspects of military life said: ‘Yeah, the man got rid of reveille and I hear he’s gonna get rid of bed check too.’ Peering from behind pink granny glasses [he continued] But he still won’t talk to us as a group. ‘3 The constant theme of group rather than individual recognition manifests itself as a challenge to the traditional avenues of interest articulation.

On the other hand, official policy and the attitudes of leaders have remained fundamentally committed to action aimed at dealing with individuals. The commanding officer, a Colonel, of a 4,000 man cavalry regiment said recently,

Now this gets back to the emphasis of the black soldier on brotherhood and togetherness and we’ve got to stick together. The black soldier, I assume, feels that other people like me are not sticking up for him and protecting his rights, and therefore the only way to protect the black man is black solidarity. Therefore, they’ve gone to the extreme of right or wrong, if he is black, get in there and pitch with him. If we could get over that and treat people as individuals, then we’ve got it licked. But I haven’t been able to beat it.

A Black general has called “ the military the best possible career a young man could seek. He said to young Blacks, you can wield a lot more power from on top with authority than on the bottom with a brick or a torch. If you reach the top, then you can help others up.”

The desire of high-ranking officers to deal with all soldiers on an individual basis is not unnatural. To have reached the policy- making level, these officers have been immersed, successfully, with their military peers in keen individual competition for from twenty to thirty-five years. While they may understand that Black soldiers are educationally and economically deprived beforeentering the Army, it is difficult for these officers to perceive of young Americans with a conception of competition and an identity differing from that of their own. That individual competition should be rejected in favour of group formation and co-operation is almost inconceivable to them. This is especially true of high-ranking Black officers who have had to overcome unique difficulties strictly through personal excellence. Thus, as Professor Janowitz relates, ‘. . . professional experiences become deeply intertwined in fashioning an officer’s outlook . . . this does not mean that officers are insincere in their beliefs about military policy, but that they are human beings. ’42 They are subject, according to the experience of this author, to psychological, sociological and cultural constraints as is any body of actors operating within a particular institutional structure.

It is clear that the confrontation of the traditional authority structure with the demanded legitimacy of the Black soldier group is intense and fundamentally incompatible with the official policies of integration and traditionally oriented expectations of high-ranking officers. If this is so, and at the level of intensity indicated in the preceding discussion, what reasons may be put forward to explain why this confrontation has not rendered the Army incapable of maintaining any semblance of internal order?

First, the Army has very recently afforded a measure of legitimacy to certain symbols around which the cohesiveness of the Black primary group is built. This, however, will be elaborated in a later section along with other positive measures taken by the Army to reduce racial tension.

Next, through the provisions of Article 212 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the Army may legally discharge from active service any soldier considered ‘unfit’ or ‘unsuitable’ for military duty.4 3 At some large United States installations, there has been an overt and concerted command effort to have Black militants and activists eliminated from the Army on the basis of this provision.4 4 Generally, this involves awarding something less than an Honorable Discharge when the separation is effected, perhaps another factor in the high rate of less than Honorable Discharges awarded to Black soldiers .4

Further, personnel turbulence created by the manpower needs of the war in Vietnam dictated that men change duty stations every few months. Some units experienced 100 per cent rotation of personnel every eight to nine months.46 This fact alone prevents the continuity of the Black Power movement in the Army. Since Black Power is a charismatic movement rather than a bureaucratic one, leadership and rank-and-file discontinuity have been disastrous.

Fourthly, the Army has made an effort to prevent Black soldiers from physically coming together to organize when it is thought group action will precipitate violence. In Germany, security police at certain installations are ‘under orders to break up five or more blacks in a group. ‘4 At an Army aviation post in the Southern United States, any off-duty group of three or more soldiers is to be reported to the military police.4 8 There are many such examples. One of the most effective means of preventing organization has been to order the units of a command to participate in separate unit field manoeuvres. At one post in 1970, field manoeuvres were planned, in advance, to coincide with days of local or national Black Power significance.

If large, impromptu meetings of Black soldiers were held at this installation, the entire 3,500 man regiment was ordered, almost immediately, to participate in staggered field manoeuvres that kept each unit in the field for three or four days. This effectively reduced any threat of further organization until the field exercise ended weeks later. That these manoeuvres were being held for the purposes here stated was openly expressed at middle level command meetings which were attended by this author. 5 °

Finally, one of the most important reasons for a lack of greater strength among the Black Power movement in the Army is the high proportion of Black soldiers who use drugs. Although there are no published official data concerning the extent of drug abuse among soldiers, information is available from Army hospitals and attitude surveys of soldiers. The following table was prepared from the number of drug investigations conducted by the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division. Although it cannot be taken as accurate, trends of increasing drug abuse are clearly evident.c

Conclusive information indicating the number of Black soldiers using drugs compared to White soldiers is not available. However, a statement made by a young Negro soldier fighting drug addiction among Blacks in Vietnam describes the severity of the problem.

One major, an Army surgeon, reported that his hospital records indicate that 46 per cent of all Army personnel in Europe have experimented with an illegal drug at least once. Sixteen per cent of the soldiers are using them more than three times pet week. Thirty per cent of this last group are using or have used drugs more potent than hashish which is eight to ten times more potent than marijuana.

Table 3. Number of Drug Investigations, 19697152

11,758   14,571   18,898

Total for first six months of 1971 to give projection for the year. \* \* Not including Vietnam

He claims that drugs have broken the motivation of Black soldiers to organize. He said, ‘the Black Power movement in Vietnam has been crippled by the growing use of heroin among the bloods [an alternative metaphor for “brother”]. The skag’s [heroin] got them down. Some brothers don’t even want to go home now. I put it to him [I tell my fellow Blacks] that by skagging he is supporting the oppressors.

Hosea Williams, a Negro former research chemist with fourteen years’ experience in the United States, visited troops in Vietnam and reported ‘the Black man’s number-one enemy is that damn dope, not George Wallace, the Nixon administration, or the Vietnam war. Dope is a scheme to mess up the minds of Black people.

The foregoing measures taken by the Army leadership to deal with the implications of an aroused Black consciousness indicate a negative and repressive perspective. Yet, this is only one element of the official reaction. The Army has also devised positively directed efforts to reduce racial conflict. The resulting action may be grouped under two broad headings: integration oriented, on the one hand, and a granting of legitimacy to the life style enjoyed by Black soldiers on the other.

First, under the heading of integration, the Army has participated in ‘Project Transition’. Here, private businesses near Army posts train selected soldiers in civilian occupational skills during the last six months of the soldier’s active duty commitment

However, a confidential White House survey among veterans in the ghettos and depressed areas found that programme was ‘not pushed by commanders; enrollment rates were less than 10%; and it was helping only about a quarter of those men who did participate.’55 Black militants have attacked Project Transition saying it is ‘hypocritical. Much effort is being made to keep the Negro veteran from becoming disillusioned with the American system while the “war on poverty” is being scrapped.’ 5 6 Availability of Project Transition openings is controlled by very strictly enforced unit attendance quotas. No unit with which this observer was attached ever permitted more than 7 per cent of its total strength to be absent to attend civilian oriented day schools. 5 7 Selection for the few available openings was based primarily on general behaviour patterns of the competing soldiers. As discussed previously, the behavioural patterns of Black soldiers are often misunderstood by White leaders and often at odds with official expectations. As a result, the Black soldier is again at a disadvantage in a selection procedure for a programme that has been designed to help integrate him into the civilian educational and job market.

Next, great emphasis has been placed upon ensuring nondiscriminatory treatment at all levels for Black soldiers. Again the problem with this approach lies in being constrained to deal with many important variables beyond the control of those in command. Ordering fair treatment is, by itself, ineffective. Finally, a less grandiose step in easing racial tensions is that of encouraging racially mixed groups of approximately ten people plus a moderator to discuss problems. A high ranking civilian co-ordinator of one of these projects – ‘Human Awareness Encounter Groups’ – described the programme as follows: ‘People learn by being involved, not by passive lectures . . . by having mixed groups – black and white, male and female, married and single people – we get through the personal gamesmanship of individuals very rapidly and then can concentrate on honestly reasoning out the real gut issues which cause racial tensions. ‘S 8 Army sources claim this attack is meeting with some success.

The following measures, on the other hand, indicate the granting of an emerging legitimacy to the aroused ‘Black consciousness’. Steps taken here include the publication, by the Armed Forces, of official and extremely complete bibliographies of suggested readings for Black soldiers. One Air Force bibliography includes works by militants and activists such as Eldridge Cleaver and Malcolm X.5 9 Official newspapers published by the military now include current suggested readings for Black soldiers which also include the works of militants.6 Further, commercial items produced exclusively for Blacks are now being stocked by Post and Base Exchanges.6 1 The military has also trained forty-nine barbers and beauticians in the art of black hair-styling, and has sent them to military installations all over the world. 62 Some foods traditionally enjoyed by Blacks are now being prepared in dining halls.

Far more significant, however, is the emerging re-evaluation the Army has made of its policy towards sanctioned organizations by recommending that free time be granted to those soldiers who wish to attend gatherings of significance to Black Americans. In Korea and Vietnam, ‘Army spokesmen said that directives had been sent from Washington urging commanders to grant passes liberally for soldiers wishing to honor Dr. [Martin Luther] King. ‘6 4 Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the Army is providing grievance articulation channels that bypass the traditional chain of command. Here Black group interests may be articulated at Post level, i.e., Black soldier groups may confront generals with their complaints.

From personal interviews with soldiers in Germany in January 1972 and in England in March 1972, this author found that this attempt at easing both racial and general military tensions was perceived by low-ranking soldiers as a worthwhile, effective endeavour. Of the low-ranking enlisted soldiers interviewed, all verbally expressed approval of this new form of grievance articulation. There is, of course, another aspect to this problem. Although soldiers commented that it made Army life ‘almost tolerable’, two high-ranking NCOs questioned felt the Army could not ‘carry out its mission’ under the new scheme for tension management. ’65 This is generally true throughout the Army. A government survey found that NCOs complained ‘that commanders now have so many open door policies [i.e., grievance sessions] for enlisted men that the troops no longer have to go through their sergeants. The non-commissioned officer . . . is the odd man out under the modern Army concept. ’66 Since motivation for promotion among enlisted ranks has traditionally been to achieve the status of sergeant, the implied lower status of the NCO indicates a fundamental structural change in the Army.

In summary, the focus of United States Army policy toward the Negro soldier has shifted somewhat from a rigid policy of ensuring ‘equal opportunity’ to a policy of recognizing, to some degree, a behavioural pattern different and perhaps at odds with the pattern implicitly required by the traditional structure of the military institution.

Thus, the Army leadership is making an attempt to meet this challenge to the traditional structure of the Army through various channels. Signs of positive change have recently begun to emerge. It is not clear if this is due to official efforts or other factors, such as a general lowering of overt tension and violence in the United States. It is clear, however, that those who formulate official policy have become more sensitive to the real deficiencies in previous formulations.

The Army leadership, through directives and new policies, has been forced to treat the Black soldier with an unprecedented respect for the latter’s dignity’ The question really lies in whether those in authority believe in the quality of this dignity, or whether they are merely ensuring their own promotion, waiting for the present wave of social discontent to subside. It is in this question that the success or failure of many of the above programmes lie.

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