

# "We Have Come a Long Ways ... We Have a Ways to Go"

Col. Dwayne Wagner, U.S. Army, Retired

*During the Civil War, Frederick Douglass used his stature as the most prominent African American social reformer, orator, writer and abolitionist to recruit men of his race to volunteer for the Union army. In his "Men of Color to Arms! Now or Never!" broadside, Douglass called on formerly enslaved men to "rise up in the dignity of our manhood and show by our own right arms that we are worthy to be freemen."*

—Farrell Evans, History.com

Little did Frederick Douglass know that Black Americans would continue to serve in every subsequent war for America and return home to face racism, bigotry, and second-class citizenship. So, when someone asks if the Army has changed regarding the treatment of Black or African American soldiers, I answer this question using the same phrase my father used in the 1960s and 1970s: "We have come a long ways ... we have a ways to go."

After answering this question, the follow-on conversation typically is reflective of the person's race. Black friends and associates spend more time trying to convince me that "we have a very long way to go" as they focus on the glass that is half empty: personal encounters with racism or bias, discrimination, or statistics tied to selection rates for battalion and brigade command or senior service college. My White coworkers or lifetime friends reflect on legal and cultural changes since the 1960s and believe that the Army "has come a very long way" in embracing Black Americans. Can both voices be right?

Each voice then asks, "How do we know when we are?" Let me use my journey since 1956 to try to respond

to both voices. As an Army officer (1978–2008), an Army civilian (2008–2021), and the son of a soldier (1956–1978), I have sixty-four years of watching Army race relations morph, sometimes forced by society and other times leading social change due to our Army values.

## The 1950s: The Cold War and Desegregation

"President Harry S. Truman signed an executive order in 1948 ending segregation in the military and in the federal workforce. Executive Order 9981 said, 'There shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.' Truman's support of civil rights was an abrupt change from his early thoughts on the black community, as shown by many of his letters to friends and family that used racist language. He later changed his ways, writing a friend to say, 'I am not asking for social equality, because no such thing exists, but I am asking for equality of opportunity for all human beings and, as long as I stay here, I am going to continue that fight.'"<sup>1</sup>

While Truman was struggling with decisions of race, my grandfather and father worked as sharecroppers in East Texas amid the virulent racism of the 1930s and 1940s. My father left sharecropping at the age of nineteen and joined the Army in 1949 because he had no other options as a poor African American man during this era. Our family land that belonged to his grandfather was stolen by Whites who used a rigged tax system to steal land from Black landowners. This was an institutionalized practice in the early 1900s through the 1950s, and some remnants remain today. The U.S. Department of Agriculture continues to address historical institutional



(Graphic by Stephen Breen, *San Diego Union Tribune*. Used with permission)

racism's impact on Black farmers today by establishing a program designed to compensate for historical discrimination. The Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program is part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and specifically includes Black farmers or families penalized by earlier institutional discrimination.

My father was later shipped off to Korea as an infantryman. The timing of his arrival (1950) dovetailed with Truman's executive order. My father integrated an all-White infantry regiment that was engaged in combat operations. His stories include (1) the company commander initially refusing to shake his hand, (2) the burning of his personal tent and belongings, and (3) the White soldiers who embraced him as an equal. So, through the prism of my grandfather and father—and Truman's executive

order—"race relations had come a long ways." Yet, in 1951, my father returned to an America that treated him as a second-class citizen: back of the bus; enter through the back door; housing redlining, employment discrimination; and do not make eye contact with a White man or argue with him in public. In 1951, we had an exceptionally long way to go in achieving racial equality within our Nation and the Army (a reflection of American society).

### **The 1960s: Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement**

From a legal standpoint, the 1960s marked a transformation of the realities of discrimination and political equality for Black people with the passing of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act (1964 and 1965, respectively). The 1960s also marked the



Staff Sgt. Lucious Wagner, the author's father, talks on a desk phone circa 1950s while stationed at Kaiserslautern, Germany. (Photo courtesy of the author)

full engagement of the United States in the war in Vietnam. In support of this campaign to uphold democracy, Black soldiers continued the tradition of serving the Army with distinction.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1960s, we traveled from the West Coast to the South or from several points to Texas. We would stop at a gas station, my father would go inside and return, and we would depart without buying gas. At the time, I did not understand. Years later, I learned that my father would ask if he could use the restroom. If the attendant said no, my dad was not going to buy gas and give them money. As a military family member, I learned to only give money or business to people who treated me with dignity and respect.

## The 1970s: Post-Vietnam and the Post-Civil Rights Era

Since its establishment in 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has been committed to using the full Constitutional power, statutory authority, and financial

resources of the federal government to ensure that African Americans and other marginalized communities in the United States have the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. The Caucus is chaired by Congresswoman Joyce Beatty. As part of this commitment, the CBC has fought for the past 48 years to empower these citizens and address their legislative concerns by pursuing a policy agenda that includes but is not limited to the following:

- reforming the criminal justice system and eliminating barriers to reentry;
- combatting voter suppression;
- expanding access to education from pre-k through level;

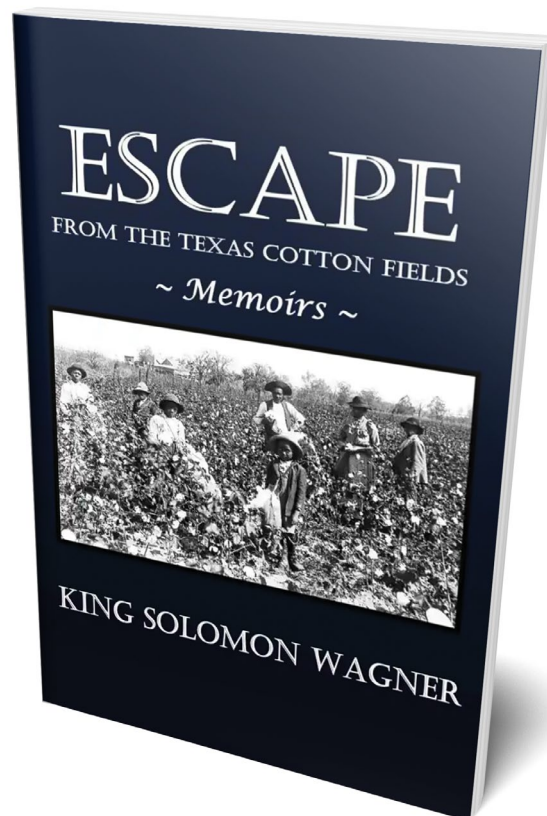
- expanding access to quality, affordable health care and eliminating racial health disparities;
- expanding access to technologies, including broadband;
- strengthening protections for workers and expanding access to full, fairly-compensated employment;
- expanding access to capital, contracts, and counseling for minority-owned businesses; and
- promoting U.S. foreign policy initiatives in Africa and other countries that are consistent <sup>3</sup>

America was transitioning from a decade of civil rights when my father retired from the Army in 1970 at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, where he taught finance policy and procedures to second lieutenants. This man who integrated an all-White regiment in 1950 was now teaching White officers in 1970, and he was evaluating them. Toward the end of his military career, he had transitioned to loving America, warts and all, because he was seeing progress. My father prepared to move us from a relatively integrated military environment to the all-Black neighborhood of Oak Cliff in Dallas.

My family moved to Dallas in 1970. We lived in subsidized housing, received food stamps, and my dad attended college part time and worked two part-time jobs while raising six children. The six children later attended college (five lived at home), thanks to aid from the federal government and the state of Texas. Each became a future taxpayer. I learned that government has a role in providing short-term bootstraps for poorer Americans. My high school was over 90 percent White before busing and over 90 percent Black after busing. The Whites moved further out in the suburbs instead of attending school with me and other Blacks. I then learned that many Whites did not want to associate with me, an eye-opening discovery for me because of our military background. I was in high school Junior Reserved Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) from 1970 to 1974. Our senior naval

professor of military science was a White retired naval officer working in an almost all-Black high school. He cared about us, treated me with dignity and respect, and was willing to admit that my journey would be harder based on race alone.

I attended the lowest academically ranked high school in the state of Texas. In my junior year, despite my SAT scores and my 3.8 grade point average, my counselor told me to join the Army because I was not college material. She did not talk to me about junior college or trade school. At the time, I was naïve and impressionable, and I agreed with her; my father did not. My JROTC instructor urged me to live at home and attend a local college. Since my father was already a student at Bishop College, this made sense. I learned that my high school preparation would possibly be challenged based on scores on standardized tests. The two only White influencers in my life, my counselor and my Navy JROTC instructor, disagreed on my potential. The counselor did not see college in my future. My instructor did. After graduating, I wondered if she stereotyped me or honestly believed that the SAT score was accurate.



Book cover of *Escape from the Texas Cotton Fields* depicting the author's aunts and uncles in a cotton field in East Texas circa the late 1940s. King Solomon Wagner, the author's uncle, died in 2018. (Photo courtesy of the author)



I later matriculated at Bishop College, excelled in ROTC, and was elected student body president my senior year. I learned that an all-Black educational environment could nurture and inspire an academically disadvantaged Black student. While attending Bishop College, my ROTC professors, four graduates of HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities),

graduates. I learned again that some would use my educational credentials against me.

Circa 1983, I attended a nine-week military school, and my instructor (an armor lieutenant colonel) and I bonded. Lt. Col. Joseph T. Snow (now deceased) invested in me and talked openly about racism in the Army. As a White officer, he was witness to some of the blatant



Battalion command helped me understand that the Army was becoming less race conscious, while society continued to lag.



told me to attend a primarily White university for my graduate degree because my White Army bosses would discount my HBCU college education. I started my Army journey with imposter syndrome.

## 1980s: A Decade of Reorganization and Cold War Adventures

Meanwhile, civil-rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and public figures like Mohammed Ali made the case that Vietnam was an example of a “race war” in which the White U.S. establishment is using colored mercenaries to murder brown-skinned freedom fighters. On the other side, there were men like Staff Sgt. Glide Brown Jr., exemplars of the fact that Vietnam was the first truly integrated conflict in U.S. military history. He was Black, the men he commanded were not, and that did not seem to matter. Though African American fighters had defended the United States since the earliest days of the Nation, and the military had officially been desegregated in the 1940s, segregation was still largely in practice in Korea. For the men to whom *Time* spoke, the numbers, which could also be read as the Black man taking the brunt of the war’s burden, were evidence of inroads being made.<sup>4</sup>

In 1981, while serving as a lieutenant at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, my boss, thinking he was complimenting me during a counseling, said, “Dwayne, as well as you write, it is obvious you did not attend a HBCU.” I replied, “Sir, Bishop College had 999 Black students and about fifteen internationals. It is a HBCU.” This former West Point English professor turned red in the face. He knew that I knew he harbored some bias regarding HBCU

and undercover racism. In 1985, he called and told me to apply for graduate school. I did. I was selected for a fully funded program and spent fifteen months at a primarily White university earning a master’s degree through a process that included a thesis, oral comprehensives, and written comprehensives. In October 2000, he attended my promotion ceremony to colonel. Snow was one of my mentors from 1985 until his death four years ago. I learned that my mentors would not always look like me.

From 1983 to 1986, I served at Fort Riley, Kansas. My commanders were outstanding: competent, fair, progressive. Both treated me with dignity and respect. I cannot say the same about the local Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID), who used a minor investigation of one of my sergeants to go after me for dereliction of duty. My commander and others were convinced that my race influenced the decision to charge me. Luckily, and thanks to my chain of command and senior leaders at CID headquarters, I was “taken out of the title block,” which effectively meant that CID recognized that the local office and the staff judge advocate made the wrong decision. Then, during the last three decades, and now, I am convinced that unconscious bias on part of the CID commander led to a very unusual decision to place a company commander in the title block for an administrative oversight.

My time in Kansas was mostly good, yet there were moments. I went to Manhattan, Kansas, to buy a car. The salesman said, “I have to call your first sergeant to make sure you are a good soldier.” Remember, I am an Army captain, in command of a company of 165 soldiers. During the phone call, I hear the voice on the other end yell, “Why

are you calling me about my company commander?"

The red-faced salesman says to me, "Why didn't you tell me you were a captain?" I replied, "Why did you assume I required vetting from a first sergeant?" I asked for the manager, who quickly apologized for his salesman. I did not buy from them. Several months later, while visiting a dining facility on a Saturday morning in civilian clothes, the sergeant pushed my money back and said, "Only officers pay surcharge." I then pulled out my ID card and said, "Sergeant, why would you think I am not an officer?" He knew I knew that he stereotyped me. Again, I learned that some people used my race to label me.

In 1986, we moved to Huntsville, Texas. The Army gave me fifteen months to complete a fully funded graduate program at Sam Houston State University, known for its criminal justice and corrections programs. Living in Huntsville allowed me to re-see Texas, as I had been away for nine years. The school treated me well. My professors were great. Not so much the town. The following occurred while living in Huntsville from 1985 to 1986:

- I am cutting my lawn, and a car stops and the White driver says, "My yard is about the same size, what you charge?" I reply, "I live here." The man drives off.
- My wife Edna answers the door. The man says, "Is the lady of the house in?" Edna says, "Who?" The man says, "Is the homeowner in?" Edna replies, "I live here." The man walks away.
- I need to take a taxi home from downtown Huntsville. The Black cab driver gets my address and says, "Are you sure the address is right? We don't live in that neighborhood." As he dropped me off, he said, "Be careful brother, we ain't supposed to live here."
- Two months later, my lease was invalidated due to the homeowner not approving the contract I signed with the real estate company. We self-moved to an apartment. Others believe the owner learned that we were Black.

My graduate school assignment reminded me of the historical racism in Texas and that my job status, education, and socioeconomic position meant nothing. To many locals, I was just another "N-word," a word I heard several times and pretended to not hear. The Army then sent me to the Mannheim Correctional Facility (Germany) for a graduate school payback tour of three years. From 1987 to 1990, I worked for two leaders (Monte Pickens and Joel Dickson) and met a third, Peter

Hoffman, who would influence my career, both short term and long term, in only positive ways. Lt. Col. Pickens ordered me to teach a college class to improve my briefing ability. I thought he was an ass. I later learned that he cared about me and was preparing me for my future. Hoffman later brought me to the Pentagon, taught me how to be an Army headquarters staff officer (with the aid of Bruce Conover), and later eased my move to one of the most prestigious jobs for a military police major: field grade assignment officer, Army Personnel Command. Again, I learned that my mentors and sponsors could be fair-minded White men who treated all well.

## The 1990s: Operation Desert Storm and Army Downsizing

When the Army deployed for the Persian Gulf War in 1990, African Americans constituted 29.06 percent of the active force. As part of its efforts to rebuild after Vietnam, the service had made a strong commitment to equal opportunity. Much of the Army's success during the war was the result of this commitment, the recruitment of high-quality personnel, better training methods, and a renewed emphasis on the importance and prestige of the noncommissioned officer corps. Leading the military during this war was the Army's second African American four-star officer and the first Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Colin L. Powell.

Four years after the war ended, Sgt. Maj. Gene C. McKinney was sworn in as the first African American Sergeant Major of the Army. Unfortunately, his tenure was cut short by allegations of sexual misconduct and his conviction at court-martial for attempting to obstruct the investigation into those allegations.<sup>5</sup>

While at the Army Personnel Command, I managed 636 officers: lieutenant colonels and majors. During a commanders' conference attended by colonels and

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Company commanders from the 705th Military Police Battalion (from left to right), Capt. Laura Eckler Cook, Capt. Sheila Lydon, Capt. Eric Barras, Capt. Kolette Trawick, join then Lt. Col. Dwayne Wagner (seated) for a photo circa 1996 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. (Photo by Edna Wagner)

lieutenant colonels, I provided a field grade update. When the diversity slide was presented, I said, “During my first six months, none of you have made a by-name-request for a Black or female officer.” I continued and concluded the brief. At the break, I was surrounded by colonels asking me if I were calling them “racist.” I responded that minority officers needed mentorship and the right jobs for development for battalion command. I later learned that I had ruffled some feathers, and I did not care. Senior leaders like Herb Tillery, Bill Hart, Larry Haynes, Sharie Russell, and others had taught me that diversity was important.

Later, while working in a different personnel job, I was advised that the incoming one-star general was biased against Black officers, and I would not fare well. This one

star was demanding, rough, and did not suffer fools well. A year later, he top blocked me on an annual evaluation, gave me a general officer potential comment on the evaluation report, and placed me among his top lieutenant colonels. I learned to be leery of “he is a racist” rumors and to give each person a chance.

I still remember the day when the director of the Officer Personnel Management Directorate, a White brigadier general, chaired a meeting with the field grade assignment officers. We were responsible for managing the careers of Army majors and lieutenant colonels. There were about thirty-five of us, supposedly the cream of the crop as we represented our branches and functional areas. There were two Black officers in the room: a field artillery major who would retire as a lieutenant general



and me. When the general got to promotion selection rates, he said, and I paraphrase:

Black officers have suffered through generational, institutional, and personal racism. Some more than others. The SECARMY [secretary of the Army] and the CSA [chief of staff of the Army] are always going to first check to see the selection rate for Black officers. If we sense our Black officers are being treated fairly, we know all are being treated fairly. Black officers are the “canary in the mine shaft.”

The heads nodded up and down and my peers understood. They saw all the files. About half of them “got it.” The other half assumed that the system was fair, and we needed better Black officers. Society is (sometimes) judged by how it treats African Americans. The canary is slowly dying.

The Army knew that racial discrimination was a factor. We had come a long way, yet we had a way to go.

## 705th Military Police Battalion, 1996–1998

In 1996, I took command of the 705th Military Police Battalion at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and was the first Black officer to do so. This was less significant because African Americans had been commanding battalions for decades, albeit at lower selection rates. My father ate breakfast at Pullman’s Restaurant in downtown Leavenworth on the morning of the change-of-command ceremony. Two tables away sat four local farmers. My dad said they were talking about the “Black lieutenant colonel taking command of the MPs [military police] and if he was qualified to do so.” My father ate his breakfast and remained silent and thought about his time in Korea (1950) and Vietnam (1968). He said nothing to the men. Three hours later, after the ceremony, he shared their comments with me. He believed that the Army had come a long way, since his son took command of a racially integrated formation. That same morning, I walked from my house to the ceremony. My mother-in-law, who was not familiar with the Army, whispered to my wife. I later learned that my mother-in-law was surprised to see White soldiers salute me. She lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and was conditioned to be subservient to Whites.

About six months into the command tour, my senior enlisted advisor, a man from Alabama, said, “Sir, I did not know you were Black until you arrived. We have

people in the battalion who served with you at Fort Sill, Mannheim, and the Pentagon, and I only heard that you would be a good commander. Sir, race relations are improving when NCOs [noncommissioned officers] focus on the man, and not his race.”

A year into command, a soldier brought his parents to my office to see me. The mother walks in and hugs my command sergeant major (CSM) and says, “Colonel Wagner, my son says you are a great commander.” My CSM, who is red-faced, points at me and says, “I am the sergeant major. HE is our commander.” The mom walks over and shakes my hand. No hug. After pleasantries, they left. Later that evening, the soldier returned, and apologized for his mother. I said, “You did not tell your mother that I was the Black man in the room or that I am Black.” The soldier said, “Sir, you are not Black. You are my commander.” Battalion command helped me understand that the Army was becoming less race conscious, while society continued to lag.

## The 2000s: 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism

The distribution of African Americans in the service by 2003 had developed in several unexpected ways. While the company grade officer percentage had risen to roughly a proportionate level, the percentage of field grade and general officers remained much lower. More surprisingly, the proportion of Black soldiers in combat specialties had declined significantly by 2003. This was in part due to the large numbers of Black women who had entered the service, and who were barred from holding such specialties. Other factors that have been suggested for this trend include higher Black unemployment rates that motivate Black males to select specialties that have skills easily transferable to civilian jobs, and family traditions of service in such specialties. Another suggested cause of this disparity is that a sizeable number of White males join not for a career or to obtain a marketable skill, but rather for the adventure and challenge provided by enlistment in the combat arms before continuing on with their civilian education and careers.<sup>7</sup>

In 1999, I was a lieutenant colonel, former battalion commander, and senior service college selectee, and I was awaiting the results of the colonel’s list. By all accounts, I was a competent and capable officer. I was an instructor at the Combined Arms Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, and I taught a seminar made up of twelve



captains, many of whom had not commanded yet and were learning how to be staff officers.

Historically, a staff group would coordinate a farewell social the night before graduation. If the students liked

and Staff School. All saw it as a testament to my ability to connect with the captain and a need for the captain to unburden himself. In 1999, an Army captain struggled with following a Black lieutenant colonel: we have a long way



Regardless of my audience or topic, I tried to provide the other voice or a perspective that the officer could not see, from my historical vantage point.



their instructor, she or he would be invited. If the staff group did not like their instructor, she or he would not know about the gathering.

Circa March 1999, my graduating staff group invited me to their graduation party. All twelve captains attended. We ate appetizers and drank beer, and they gave a gift to me and waxed eloquently about how much they learned during the six-week course. The vibe was positive. Incredibly positive. As the evening wound down, only five captains were left, all White males, and not uncommon at all.

One of the officers looked at me, started crying, and said, “Sir, six weeks ago when you walked into the classroom, I was disappointed, and I said to myself ... and, sir, please excuse my language ... ‘what is this f--king (N-word) going to teach me.’” The officer continued to cry. The four other captains were in shock and were waiting for my response. I said, “Go on.” The captain, through sobs, said, “Sir, I judged you based solely on your race and during the last six weeks I have learned more from you about leadership than any other officer I know.”

(Silence)

The captain continued, “Sir, I am from Mississippi and my parents are racist, and I have struggled since being in the Army with accepting Blacks and this course has opened my eyes with how much I need to change.”

I said: “(John), it took guts for you to reveal yourself to me in front of your classmates. I want you to confront your racism, reach out to others, and over time get better.” We then drank another beer and talked about life, Army, and world events. Later, two of the officers who witnessed the event asked if they needed to write statements. I said no. I saw the event as a life lesson for the captain.

The following day, I shared the event with a couple of peers and the director of the Combined Arms Services

to go. In 1999, a White officer confronted his own racism and wanted to get better: we have come a long way.

### **The 2010s: The Army and Post-Racial America?**

The *Economist* called it a post-racial triumph and wrote that Barack Obama seemed to embody the hope that America could transcend its divisions. The *New Yorker* wrote of a post-racial generation and indeed, the battle-scarred veterans of the civil rights conflict of forty years ago seemed less enchanted with Obama than those who were not yet alive then. Amb. Andrew Young, a one-time aide to Martin Luther King, argued that former President Bill Clinton was every bit as black as then Sen. Obama.<sup>8</sup>

During the last twenty-one years, I was fortunate to serve as a colonel and sit on several selection boards, and as an Army civilian, to teach at a U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), interacting with the next two generations of Army leaders. Both allowed me to observe change within the Army.

From 2001 to 2008, while serving at the Pentagon and going in and out of Afghanistan, I spoke to hundreds of officers on many topics including race and diversity. The conversations with White officers typically focused on how race relations and diversity have improved, with leaders providing personal vignettes of success stories. Conversely, my conversations with Black officers focused on the relative lack of diversity or personal stories of racism, bigotry, discrimination, conscious bias, or unconscious bias. Regardless of my audience or topic, I tried to provide the other voice or a perspective that the officer could not see, from my historical vantage point. Too many White officers want to believe that the Army is post-racial, and we are all

green. Well, we are light-green and dark green. Too many Black officers sometimes look for racism and bias where it does not exist. We wake up in the morning, expecting to be treated differently, lesser. Well, sometimes we are treated with disrespect based on racism or bias.

Is there still a vestige or vestiges of institutional racism in the Army? Or are we seeing more personal racism, bigotry, and bias? I will use the centralized board process as an example. I believe that Army selection

boards tend to understand the process is as fair as it can be, based on my thirty years of conversations. However, most officers will never serve on a selection board, and in 2021, some still wonder if the process is fair to all.

With great fanfare, the Army recently decided to remove photographs from the board vote, rationalizing that the photo allows visual bias to seep into some votes. Yet, this knee-jerk reaction did not consider that bias occurs when the officer is rated in the operational force



Retired Col. Dwayne Wagner (*third from left, top row*) and other Command and General Staff College instructors of Team 11 pose for a photo in front of the college 24 May 2021 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

boards and the process we use to identify board members, vote the files, and produce a list is as fair as a paradigm can be. Yet, humans, who may be consciously or unconsciously biased, write the officer evaluation reports and decades later sit on the boards. Even with mechanisms for addressing board members who vote out of tolerance (outlier votes), if I am subconsciously biased, I may vote a file a tad lower or higher than the rest of the board members. Black officers who have served on

and the board simply votes the officer evaluation reports or quality of the file. I believe the board process is not as biased as some allude, and taking away the photograph may have an unintended outcome. Most board members are White males. My experience tells me that many understand historical or institutional bias and use the photo to self-reflect. Did the Black woman with the two highly qualified block checks and most qualified-level narrative receive the evaluation based on potential or unconscious



bias? For thirty years, I have talked to senior White leaders who knew that women and racial minorities were sometimes subjected to biased evaluations. Sometimes, not most times. These leaders appreciated having the photograph so they could have the whole picture.

Since 2008, I have interacted with CGSC students and officers attending the School for Command Preparation. The conversations typically align with the officer's tribal view. Whites typically believe the Army is a fair institution with minor race concerns. Black officers, in general, believe that the Army continues to fail to identify leaders who are racist, biased, or unfair.

CGSC instructors, historically the bastion of White males from the combat arms (maneuver, fires, and operations) or logistics, increasingly are teaching a diverse student body. The college struggles to be as diverse as some want, yet Black officers tend to shy away from teaching or serving in Kansas. In the mid-90s when I assigned officers to teach at CGSC, diversity was a direct outcome of the three-star commandant or one-star deputy commandant, as they interacted with the Army G-1 or Human Resources Command to demand or ask for minority instructors. Some cared more than others. Whether the 1990s or 2020s, leaders wanted diversity but only had so much control. Students wanted diversity, and most would choose not to come back because other career tracks were considered more competitive for selection to battalion command or promotion to colonel. Last, Assignment Interactive Module 2.0 provides one more dynamic to diversity, as each teaching department now controls who (branch, race,

gender, experience) they hire in a one-to-one match. If a department is made up of only White instructors, should the deputy director consciously look for Black, Hispanic, or Asian instructors?

## U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Circa 2013

Several vignettes:

In 1990, I was advised to watch my back as a CGSC student because the faculty had it out for Black students, but I was treated fairly and with dignity and respect. In 2021, some Black students continue to arrive to school believing that they may not be treated well based on race. Most are treated fairly and with dignity and respect. Few suffer true racism or discrimination. Yet, some deal with instructors who suffer from unconscious bias and allow race, gender, branch, or component to influence grading or reputation. How do I know? I talk privately to instructors in all departments who are trying to be fair and just. Conversely, students, who are not mine, share stories. In 2021, race is still a factor.

An advertisement for the U.S. Army War College's "Let's Talk, Session 1: Race, Diversity, and Inclusion" that took place virtually and in-person 5 November 2020 at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army War College)



Several years ago, a videotape was made that would be used with all 1,200 CGSC students. While it was in draft stage, no one noticed that there were no Black participants among the crew of twelve. When I advised that our diverse student body would not appreciate the lack of diversity, I was met with two voices: “Dwayne, I see your point; we need to fix this”; or “Dwayne, I do not see your point; these are the twelve who volunteered.” Luckily, most were able to understand that the college would send a poor signal, and I made a recommendation to how we could add a Black member (not me). If I had not been asked to review the video, we could have produced a visual that could have been dismissive of our Black students. Faculty diversity allows identification of blind spots.

Are we too sensitive in 2021? Can an instructor give constructive feedback and not worry about the student alleging gender bias or racism? Can a student receive constructive feedback and simply trust that the instructor is only trying to provide professional development? I know instructors who shy away from tough feedback for Black officers in order to not be labeled a racist. I know weaker students who cannot handle constructive feedback and consciously look for the racial boogeyman. In 2021, race influences learning.

I have been incredibly pleased with the academic deans and directors at the CGSC. Both offices are sensitive to diversity, student perceptions, and faculty inclinations. I am comfortable knowing that a Black student going before an academic board is going to be judged by leaders who are conscious of potential organizational bias or faculty unconscious bias. I appreciated the director who called me to his office, showed me five photographs of who was

slated to be academically boarded, discussed each situation, and asked me if faculty bias contributed to only Black officers being identified in a three-month window. He cared enough to ask the question. Also, when I challenged another director about mentoring and diversity, he pulled out a folder with eight officer record briefs and talked to me about the three Black captains among them. This colonel knew their lives, spouses, and families and was involved in their next career move. Yet, another director, a fine Army officer and man, upon learning that the Army War College taught a diversity elective and CGSC did not, said, “I thought we were post-racial, Dwayne, and those days are over.” We met for coffee the next day. In 2021, senior leaders are sensitive to race as an influence.

In November 2020, I participated on a panel at the Army War College that focused on race, diversity, and inclusion. As I prepared for this venture, I thought about 1991 when my CGSC class of 1,100 students was ushered into the large auditorium to watch the movie *Glory*, and then we went back to our seminars to talk race relations. In February 2021, I was the guest speaker for the local Black History Month program. As I prepared for the presentation, I reminisced about doing the same program in 1997, where I voiced a hope that America would stop celebrating Black history, because it is truly American history. For both the panel and the presentation I said,

“My grandfather’s generation was voiceless.

My father’s generation was very patient.

My generation is patient.

The next generation is impatient.

We have come a long way. Yet, we have a way to go.” ■

## Notes

**Epigraph.** Farrell Evans, “Why Frederick Douglass Wanted Black Men to Fight in The Civil War,” History.com, last updated 10 February 2021, accessed 7 April 2021, <https://www.history.com/news/frederick-douglass-civil-war-black-recruitment>.

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3. “About the CBC,” Congressional Black Caucus, accessed 28 May 2021, <https://cbc.house.gov/about/>.

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5. “The Army and Diversity,” U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed 7 April 2021, <https://history.army.mil/html/faq/diversity.html>.

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7. “The Army and Diversity.”

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