



Why DoD Should Drop DEI and Affirm Meritocracy in the Military

Background and Overview

For more than 30 years, America's military has been subjected to progressive experiments, directed by mostly civilian social engineers. Positive changes have occurred, but to an increasing degree, egalitarian "experts" have shifted priorities, re-defined values and standards, and taken ideology to harmful extremes.

Social engineers have escaped accountability for their mistakes, but our military is in trouble and an honest reassessment of what is now called "wokeism" in our military is long overdue.

A. The Importance of a Standard of Review

After serving on the 1992 **Presidential Commission on the Assignment of women in the Armed Forces**, CMR President **Elaine Donnelly** founded the **Center for Military Readiness**, which reports on and analyzes social issues that affect readiness and morale in the U.S. armed forces.¹

Congress directed the 1992 Presidential Commission to investigate all issues surrounding the assignments of women in the military, particularly positions that were, at the time, available only to men.² Early in its deliberations, the Commission adopted a resolution that essentially determined how its members would formulate recommendations on the scores of issues before the commission. Whether members were talking about infantry squads, aviation, or submarines, the commission's priorities and standard of review were clear:

"Equal opportunity (EO) in the military is important, but if there is a conflict between equal opportunity and the needs of the military, the needs of the military must come first."

The Presidential Commission determined in its findings that **President Harry Truman's** 1948 Executive Order ending racial segregation in the military advanced equal opportunity long before the civilian world. The *primary* purpose of Truman's order, however, was military necessity in the **Korean War** era.³

Racial strife occurred during the **Vietnam** era, aggravated by activation of the draft, 1960s-era drug abuse, and misguided social experiments. **Project 100,000**, for example, deployed thousands of Category IV "**New Standards Men**," many of whom were killed in Vietnam or failed after they left the Army.⁴

These social problems were mitigated but not eliminated by ending the draft and establishment of the **All-Volunteer Force (AVF)**. Over time, the military earned a reputation for equal treatment of all personnel, based on non-discrimination and recognition of individual merit.

The late **Charles C. Moskos**, Vietnam-era draftee, military sociologist, and member of the 1992 Presidential Commission, famously described the U.S. Army as *"the only place in American life where whites are routinely bossed by blacks."*⁵

In 2011, however, the **Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC)** established a new paradigm. The MLDC's 162-page Final Report, titled *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century*, shifted priorities away from meritocracy and non-discrimination, moving instead toward "diversity" and "equity" as paramount goals.⁶

The word “diversity” was used in the MLDC Report **249** times, but the word “meritocracy” appeared not even once. **Department of Defense (DoD)** officials have quoted the MLDC report countless times since 2011, citing it as justification for unprecedented, progressive social changes in our military.

B. The Priority Paradigm Shifts

1. *Changed Priorities and Principles*

The first step in changing the culture and values of the military was to define what the MLDC Report called **Diversity for a New Era**:

*“**Recommendation 1** – DoD shall adopt the following definition: **Diversity** is all the different characteristics and attributes of individuals that are consistent with Department of Defense core values, integral to overall readiness and mission accomplishment, and **reflective of the Nation we serve.**” (p. 12, emphasis added throughout)*

The third clause of the MLDC’s definition of diversity has taken precedence over the first two, and Department of Defense “core values” have morphed into a virtue-signaling slogan: *“**Diversity is a strategic (or operational) imperative.**”*

In essence, the MLDC Report *inverted* the sound priorities set by the 1992 Presidential Commission. Instead of non-discrimination, recognition of merit, and putting the needs of the military first, the Department of Defense redefined “equal opportunity” to mean “equity” and demographic “diversity,” regardless of the consequences.

Upside-down priorities of the Diversity Industrial Complex could be summarized as follows:

*“**Military readiness and mission accomplishment are important, but if there is a conflict between military readiness and percentage-based “diversity,” diversity must come first.**”*

Attempts to create a military “*reflective of the Nation we serve*” have given rise to a powerful **Diversity Industrial Complex** in the Pentagon, directed by a small army of DoD and service branch DEI commissions, working groups, task forces, and advisory committees, including a new DoD organization called the **Defense Advisory Commission on Diversity and Inclusion (DACODAI)**.

These unaccountable power bases consistently promote equity goals based on **racial stereotypes**, and DEI bureaucrats enforce “*accountability*” mandates with “*strategic metrics*” and demographic percentages. Such practices, which have abandoned any pretext of valuing diversity of thought, experience, and background, overlook the competency, character, and qualifications of men and women who comprise military units and fighting teams.

It is hard to imagine a more racist stereotype than using skin color as a proxy for merit, character, and qualifications. Nevertheless, subsequent Executive Orders from Presidents **Barack Obama** and **Joe Biden** have solidified the government’s preference for racial and ethnic statistics over meritocratic values.⁷

The MLDC Report remains relevant today because DACODAI Chairman **Lt. Gen. Lester Lyles, USAF (Ret.)**, also chaired the MLDC. The DACODAI, which prominently displays the MLDC Report and a collection of **MLDC Issue Papers** on its website, appears to be picking up where General Lyles’ previous diversity commission left off.⁸

With or without the “**E**” for **Equity** or “**A**” for **Accessibility**, it is long past time to examine the premises underlying the MLDC and DACODAI **Diversity & Inclusion (D&I)** agenda.

2. Treating the Military Like a Business Enterprise

The Summary and a sub-section of the MLDC Report presaged shifting priorities that relied on corporate business consultants for guidance and were not supported by credible evidence of a need for radical change in the armed forces.

As stated in a section titled “**Diversity Management: An Institutional Priority,**” the MLDC consulted “**nonmilitary organizations,**” and reviewed:

“... relevant management literature and a number of diversity goals from successful businesses. These emphasize the importance of developing and utilizing the diversity of workforces in ways that improve outcomes, such as generating a larger customer base, boosting revenue, and improving cost-effectiveness.” (p. 17)

These factors may be important in private business, but the mission of the military is not pleasing customers or “boosting revenues.” The MLDC nevertheless recommended release of a “**mission statement that prioritizes equity and inclusion and provides a purpose that is actionable, measurable, and accompanied by a concept of operations to advance implementation.**” (p. 18)

Then the MLDC Report took a step off the deep end, admitting that concepts endorsed in the Report would redefine “*fair treatment*” and be difficult to understand.

“In particular, although good diversity management rests on a foundation of fair treatment, it is not about treating everyone the same. This can be a difficult concept to grasp, especially for leaders who grew up with the EO-inspired mandate to be both color and gender blind.” (p. 18)

The meaning of this paradigm shift was clear: The MLDC called for a “**deliberate strategy that ties the new diversity vision to desired outcomes via policies and metrics.**” (p. xviii) Furthermore, such practices would not be about “*treating everyone the same.*” (p. 18)

Recommendation #15 of the MLDC Report discussed enforcement mechanisms “*to ensure a sustained focus on diversity and diversity imperatives,*” including a call for the appointment of a “**Chief Diversity Officer**” (CDO) reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. (p. 97)

Leaders who “*grew up*” with equal opportunity principles of non-discrimination and color-blindness were thereby put on notice that at every step of their careers – from recruitment, command assignments, to promotions, particularly to 3- and 4-star rank and service chief levels – “**reporting tools**” would be used to achieve “**diversity metrics**” (another name for quotas).

- “*With such data and tools, military leaders at all levels can be held accountable for their performance in diversity management and rewarded for their efforts*” (or hit with career penalties if they don’t.) (p. xviii)
- **Recommendation #16** called for “**diversity strategic plans**” in all the services, addressing “*all stages of a servicemember’s life cycle*” and adding, “*Each strategic plan shall include a diversity mission statement that prioritizes equity and inclusion and provides a purpose that is actionable and measurable.*” (p. 128)
- Hammering the point home, Recommendation #16 further advocated for a “**standard set of strategic metrics and benchmarks**” to enable the Secretary of Defense to “*measure progress toward the goals identified in the strategic plan,*” and to “*allow for the collection of data needed to generate these metrics and the analysis needed to inform policy action.*” (p. 129)

The Department of Defense’s abandoning of a colorblind equal opportunity paradigm focusing on merit, competence, and qualifications – trading that concept for one of *unequal* treatment based on color consciousness – is inexplicable.

Every person who dons the uniform of our Armed Forces takes an oath to “**support and defend the Constitution.**”⁹ The U.S. Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection of the law incorporates a colorblind approach to race.¹⁰ But the color conscious DEI structure, which treats people differently based on skin color or ethnicity, encourages both officers and enlisted personnel to violate their oath of office and to enjoy career rewards if they do.

It is hard to imagine a more pernicious way to undermine the integrity of our military than race-conscious policies that blatantly encourage oath breaking while incentivizing military people to treat others differently, based on the color of their skin.

3. “**Business Model**” Disregards Cohesion and the Culture of the Military

The MLDC Report’s reliance on civilian experts citing business data and dynamics, not the unique culture of the military, may account for the MLDC’s astonishing call for the scrapping of “**cultural assimilation**” (treating everyone the same) in “*traditional basic training*: ”

“Cultural assimilation, a key to military effectiveness in the past, will be challenged as inclusion becomes, and needs to become, the norm. Traditional basic training, for example, is focused on assimilating individuals into a fighting force tied together by the adoption of similar terminology, customs, and attitudes. However, current military operations are executed within more-complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing operational environments that defy the warfighting standards of the past . . .” (p. 18)

This comment was simply absurd. Trained, cohesive, and lethal combat units bound together by a common mission, and supporting comrades in arms to accomplish that mission, are what it takes to win on the battlefield.

The MLDC cited no credible evidence to support its irresponsible call to replace “*warfighting standards of the past*” with “*inclusion*” as the “*norm*.” Instead, the MLDC Report relied on a 1996 **Harvard Business Review** article that was all about private companies and law firms. These enterprises, of course, have never been required to successfully close with and destroy an enemy force by fire and maneuver.¹¹ (p. 18)

Taking its DEI ideology to extremes, the Commission admitted that “***The need to leverage diversity while maintaining unit cohesion will require new training and procedures addressing new tensions.***”

Deliberate race-based discrimination to achieve “*diversity metrics*” and “*equity focused goals*” (quotas) have indeed heightened “***new tensions***” in the ranks because, as stated in the MLDC Report, “*This is not about treating everyone the same.*”

- Such recommendations eviscerate principles that underlie unit cohesion, which is properly defined as mutual trust for survival in battle.¹² As stated in the 1992 Presidential Commission Report, “***[I]ndividuals in the group [must] conform to group norms and behavior in order to ensure group survival and goals.***”
- Abandoning merit and equal treatment for unequal treatment based upon racial stereotypes will certainly produce racial “diversity,” but **only at the cost of unit cohesion and the unity of purpose needed to accomplish dangerous missions.**

Anthropologist **Anna Simons, Ph.D.**, who authored a book about life inside the Army’s **(Green Beret) Special Forces**, explained the importance of cohesion in an insightful paper published in the Heritage Foundation’s **2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength**. Quoting Dr. Simon:

“[A combat] unit can’t survive unless everyone is equally physically capable of essential, combat tasks. Attrition necessitates mutual, interchangeable reliability. . . It also demands trust among those in the unit. Individuals have to be confident that those on their left and right, as well as those leading them, are proficient.”

Dr. Simons added, *“When in extremis, no unit can afford to have members who have to second-guess one another because they see the world differently. Instead, everyone has to be sure that they share a common mindset and will respond as expected, especially when everything falls apart. . . In other words, similarity isn’t a problem: divergence is.*

“Divergence shreds dependability, which is why the criteria that matter are ability, attitude, and allegiance. They matter most because they matter to performance. Everything else that outsiders think they should be able to see, because they want to see diversity, is immaterial to what prevailing in combat requires.”¹³

William Daryl Henderson, Ph.D., a retired Army Colonel, Vietnam combat veteran, and member of the 1992 Presidential Commission, addressed real-world warfighting standards in a book titled **Cohesion – The Human Element in Combat**:

“The only force on the battlefield strong enough to make a soldier advance under fire is his loyalty to a small group and the group’s expectation that he will advance . . . conformity is expected in spite of the fact that he might personally prefer to be doing something else. Such commitment is often referred to as a calling or, at the small-unit level, as ‘not letting your buddies down.’ This is the strongest possible type of motivation for soldiers to endure the danger and hardship of war.”¹⁴

Essential elements of **horizontal and vertical cohesion**, between members of a military unit and up and down the chain of command, do not just happen. As Dr. Henderson explained, bonds of trust that overcome fear must be nurtured and never taken for granted:

“Once achieved, cohesion is not necessarily permanent. Monitoring the conditions that affect the attitudes and behavior of soldiers requires constant attention.”

These passages describe the *“cultural assimilation”* that the MLDC Report wanted to throw overboard in pursuit of *“inclusion”* as *“the norm.”* Civilian businesses strive to please customers, but they are not expected to put their lives at risk advancing on the enemy.

4. Are “Barriers” to Diversity Real?

Recommendation #18 of the MLDC Report called for *“. . . accountability reviews . . . in conjunction with the Chief Diversity Officer . . . to ‘conduct annual ‘barrier analyses’ to review demographic diversity patterns across the military cycle, starting with accessions.’* (p. 129)

Then and now, the phrase *“barrier analyses”* conveys the assumption that demographic disparities are proof of discrimination, even without evidence of discrimination. The late economist **Walter E. Williams** explained many reasons why that assumption is not valid.

*“Racial discrimination is seen as the cause of many problems of black Americans. No one argues that racial discrimination does not exist or does not have effects. The relevant question . . . is: **How much of what we see is caused by current racial discrimination?**”¹⁵*

Williams focused on human factors such as declining rates of family formation, increased numbers of children born outside of marriage, and poor education resulting in school performance below basic mastery.

In contrast, MLDC Recommendation #18 seemed to suggest that real people are nothing more than demographic data points that bureaucrats should count and recount every year:

*“a. To ensure comparability across [the] Services, DoD shall establish a **universal data collection system**, and the analyses of the data should be based on **common definitions of demographic groups**, a common methodology, and a common reporting structure.*

*“b. The annual analyses should include ‘**accession demographics**,’ ‘**retention**,’ ‘**command selection**,’ and ‘**promotion rates by race/ethnicity and gender**.’ . . .”* (pp. 129-130)

Universal data collection systems and CDOs enforcing race sensitive “*diversity metrics*” with implied threats of career penalties were arbitrary and unfair in 2011. In 2023, however, the **Supreme Court** destroyed the entire premise behind the military’s current mantra, “*Diversity is a strategic imperative.*”

5. National Security Does Not Depend Upon Incoherent and Irrational Stereotypes

The Defense Department’s new DEI paradigm keeps asserting variations of the slogan “**Diversity is our strength.**” The Department of Defense has even claimed that diversity is critical to our nation’s ability to survive on the battlefield of the future.

The Defense Department’s “Diversity Strategic Plans,” which categorize servicemen and women by their skin color and ethnicity, defy common sense. DoD claims without evidence that DEI bean-counting to determine numbers of **Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans** or **Pacific Islanders** serving in uniform contributes something essential to military readiness.

The 2011 MLDC Report instigated a sticks and carrots scheme for achieving diversity metrics revolving around racial and ethnic categories, but even a cursory examination of the canard that arbitrary categories are “strategic imperatives” exposes absurdity.

Recent words of the **Supreme Court of the United States** found these same superficial categories to be “*imprecise. . . overbroad. . . arbitrary. . . undefined. . . underinclusive. . . incoherent. . . irrational stereotypes. . . [and/or] opaque.*”¹⁶

Nevertheless, the MLDC and official DoD policy still would have us believe that our national security, indeed our survival as a nation, depends upon proportional representation of ill-defined, ever changing, and irrational stereotypes at all levels of the Armed Forces.

How and why did the Defense Department embrace such an absurd notion as official policy?

As stated above, the MLDC took the advice of civilian business consultants in recommending rigid, percentage-based mandates. In adopting the civilian business world’s strategies for “success,” the MLDC and DoD disregarded two major facts:

- Not only is the civilian business community not charged with closing with and destroying the enemy, the racial and ethnic categories underlying their business plans were created by federal bureaucrats, not by anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists, or other experts.¹⁷

- Writing in the **Federal Register** back in 1978, those federal interagency bureaucrats, to their credit, cautioned others that their racial and ethnic categories “*should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature, nor should they be viewed as determinants of eligibility for participation in any Federal program.*”¹⁸

Despite this clear and unequivocal warning, the DoD’s senior military leadership – people with stars on their shoulders, medals on their chests, and braid on the bill of their caps – and who, in many instances graduated from our nation’s elite military academies, tell us that these unscientific, incoherent, and irrational stereotypes are critical to our national security!

Bureaucratic categories tell us as much about a person’s competence as the color of their hair. Yet senior civilian and military leaders claim, with a straight face, that our survival as a nation depends on making sure we have proportionate representation of these arbitrary categories throughout the All-Volunteer Force. Illogic such as this simply defies belief.

6. *Myths Behind the Metrics*

The Supreme Court’s examination of these racial and ethnic categories, in the context of granting racial preferences for admission to public and private colleges, highlights how preposterous the “diversity is a strategic imperative” mantra really is:

- “[I]t is impossible to look at an individual and know definitively his or her race; some who would consider themselves black, for example, may be quite fair skinned.”¹⁹
- “[A]ll racial categories are little more than **stereotypes**, suggesting that immutable characteristics somehow conclusively determine a person’s ideology, beliefs, and abilities. **Of course, that is false.**”²⁰
- “Members of the same race do not all share the exact same experiences and viewpoints; far from it. A black person from rural **Alabama** surely has different experiences than a black person from **Manhattan** or a black first-generation immigrant from **Nigeria**, in the same way that a white person from rural **Vermont** has a different perspective than a white person from **Houston, Texas.**”²¹
- “[The ‘Asian’ category] sweeps into one pile **East Asians** (e.g., **Chinese, Korean, Japanese**) and **South Asians** (e.g., **Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi**), even though together they constitute about **60% of the world’s population.**”²²
- “[F]ederal officials disaggregated . . . [‘**Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders**’] from the ‘Asian’ category only in the 1990s and only “*in response to political lobbying.*”²³
- “The ‘**Hispanic**’ category covers those whose ancestral language is **Spanish, Basque, or Catalan** – but it also covers individuals of **Mayan, Mixtec, or Zapotec** descent who do not speak any of those languages and whose ancestry does not trace to the **Iberian Peninsula** but bears deep ties to the **Americas.**”²⁴
- “The ‘**White**’ category sweeps in anyone from ‘**Europe, Asia west of India, and North Africa.**’ That includes those of **Welsh, Norwegian, Greek, Italian, Moroccan, Lebanese, Turkish, or Iranian** descent. It embraces an **Iraqi** or **Ukrainian** refugee as much as a member of the **British royal family.**”²⁵
- “‘**Black or African American**’ covers everyone from a descendant of enslaved persons who grew up poor in the rural **South**, to a first-generation child of **wealthy Nigerian immigrants**, to a Black-identifying applicant with **multiracial ancestry** whose family lives in a typical American suburb.”²⁶

Professor **David E. Bernstein** of the **Antonin Scalia School of Law** at **George Mason University** summarized the illogic and incoherence of American racial and ethnic categories in the introduction to his book, *Classified, The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America*:

*“Modern American racial and ethnic classifications do not reflect biology, genetics, or any other objective source. Classifications such as Hispanic, Asian American, and white combine extremely internally diverse groups in terms of appearance, culture, religion, and more under a single, arbitrary heading. The government developed its classification scheme via a combination of amateur anthropology and sociology, interest group lobbying, incompetence, inertia, lack of public oversight, and happenstance.”*²⁷

Pentagon officials who have a vested interest in perpetuating the DEI industry nevertheless would have us believe that our survival as a nation depends upon proportional representation of poorly defined, irrational stereotypes at all levels of the armed forces.

All of this recalls the **Wizard of Oz**, who used billowing smoke and noise to rule the **Emerald City** and to frighten **Dorothy**. In the same way, highly paid consultants, amateur anthropologists, lobbyists, and bureaucrats behind the curtain have been using hot air, smoke, and noise to rule the Pentagon and intimidate promotable officers.

Unlike the fictional Wizard of Oz, who proved harmless, real-world DEI advocates have been harming our military for years.

C. Do DEI Programs Strengthen or Weaken the Military?

Under Diversity & Inclusion policies taken to extremes, standards have been “re-defined” and lowered, constitutional rights of equal protection and opportunity have been denied, more qualified candidates have faced discrimination because of their race, and high-performing minorities have faced doubts about their capabilities.

In addition, divisive **critical race theory (CRT)** instructions have demoralized the troops with “anti-racist” CRT instructions that divide personnel into “oppressors” and “the oppressed,” and routinely misrepresent American history as the story of a fundamentally racist and evil nation.²⁸

The following examples demonstrate how trust and support for the All-Volunteer Force, and operational readiness, have eroded in the DEI obsessed military of today.

1. The Recruiting Crisis

A detailed analysis of recruiting data indicates that discriminatory policies are hurting the military as an institution.

- For several years, the **Army, Navy and Air Force** have struggled to meet recruiting goals. Examining the data closely, Military.com and the Daily Caller reported that minority recruitment has remained steady or increased, but **a steep decline in white recruits is almost entirely responsible for the recruiting crisis.**²⁹
- In the Army, for example, **44,042** new white recruits in FY 2018 accounted for **56.4%** of the total. In FY 2023, that number plummeted to **25,070**, or **44.0%** of the total. Over the same period, Black and Hispanic Army recruits increased from **19.6%** and **17.2%**, respectively, to **23.5%**.
- Military.com reported, “*The rate at which white recruitment has fallen far outpaces nationwide demographic shifts.*” An Army official could not explain the steep decline in white recruits, but the demographic loss coincided with an overall shortfall of about **10,000** recruits.

- Similar patterns of white recruit losses developed across all branches of the armed services. In the Navy, for example, the number of white recruits fell from **24,343** in FY 2018 to **18,205** in FY 2023, accounting for an overall drop of about **9,000** new recruits.³⁰

2. Pilot Shortages

In 2022, the Air Force found itself with a critical shortage of pilots. DEI equity goals to increase non-white officers may have been a factor pushing mid-career pilots with families to leave the Air Force and to fly for commercial airlines instead.

- On August 9, 2022, Air Force Secretary **Frank Kendall** and then-Chief of Staff **Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.** co-signed a memorandum confirming the Air Force’s intent to reduce the percentage of white male officers from **64%** to **43%**.³¹
- The problem here should be obvious. **The Air Force told a large cohort of pilots, most of them white males, that they are no longer wanted.** The loss of experienced pilots to commercial airlines hurts recruiting, increases stress on everyone else, and leaves the Air Force with elevated risks of problems and mishaps involving less skilled pilots.³²
- All branches of the service have publicly admitted discriminatory practices, but the stated agenda of the DACODAI offers no solution to this problem because “whites” do not “improve diversity.”³³ Gen. C.Q. Brown, now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said as much when he told Air & Space Forces Magazine in 2020, **“I hire for diversity.”**³⁴
- No one seems to wonder whether racial discrimination such as this might exclude men like **Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger**, a white male **Air Force Academy** graduate who served as a pilot. In 2009, Capt. Sully saved 150 passengers and five crewmembers when he and his co-pilot drew on their own skills and experience to land their bird-stricken, disabled **US Airways** jet in the ice-cold waters of the **Hudson River**.³⁵

3. Trust and Confidence

The All-Volunteer Force has been a success, but the AVF depends on public trust and patriotism to remain strong. Defense Department leaders have a clear responsibility to restore that trust.

- The annual defense survey by the **Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute** released in November 2023 found that only a slim majority of Americans, **51%**, would recommend that family and friends join the military. This was a steep decline from the 2018 survey, when **70%** said they would recommend joining the military.³⁶
- In July 2023, a **Gallup Poll** found that confidence in the military is at its lowest point in over two decades. Even among Republicans, the rate of confidence in the military has declined over twenty points, from **91%** to **68%**.³⁷

4. If Diversity is a Strength, Why is Our Military Rated “Weak?”

The **Heritage Foundation’s 2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength** presented a dismal report card on many aspects of military readiness.

According to the Index, the Air Force is the weakest of all branches of the U.S. military, downgraded from its previous 2023 score of “**weak**” to “**very weak.**”³⁸ The **Army** and **Space Force** ratings are “**marginal,**” and the **Navy** is “**weak.**” Only the **Marine Corps** was rated as “**strong.**”

Dakota Wood of Heritage highlighted personnel problems that are getting worse:

*“The **recruiting environment** is so bad that the Navy has increased the maximum age for new enlistees and has begun accepting enlistees in the lowest category of aptitude testing. In the Army, all captains are now automatically promoted to major. In the Air Force, all officers in flight school graduate, with less than one-quarter of 1% failing due to lack of demonstrated proficiency. **Many Americans perceive the military as more interested in pushing social policy agenda programs than in ensuring that our forces are able to win in combat. Clearly, we have a problem.**”³⁹*

These and many more signs of declining support indicate that our military is in trouble. For the sake of national security, something has got to change.

D. DEI = Discrimination, Exclusion, and Inequality in the Ranks

The Pentagon keeps publishing DEI Strategic Plans illustrated with politically correct photos and graphs, but colorful brochures and slide decks cannot disguise the lack of solid data related to military readiness and morale. Advocates cannot point to evidence of positive changes justifying all the tensions and division caused by official DEI manifestos for the military.

A prime example is the **Task Force One Navy (TF1N) Final Report**, issued following nationwide racial protests in the spring and early summer of 2020. The 141-page **TF1N Report** was one of several DoD and military service plans to promote **Inclusion & Diversity (I&D)** in the Navy, and to analyze and evaluate issues such as *“racism, sexism, ableism, and other structural and interpersonal biases.”*⁴⁰

Equivocal, misleading quotes from civilian sources undermined the credibility of the Task Force One Navy Report. One paragraph in the document claimed benefits from diversity, but the two sources footnoted in support of that claim were about civilian business relationships, neither of which included the words “military” or “armed forces,” even once.

Nor did the cited documents present any data proving the value of diversity programs in the All-Volunteer Force.

- The first document claimed a **58%** advantage from diversity, but it misrepresented a footnoted quote from a 2014 analysis of stock market **“price bubbles.”**⁴¹
- The second citation, referencing a 2015 **McKinsey & Company** study, discussed a **15%** advantage in the financial performance of private companies, not military “organizations” as the Navy’s TF1N claimed.⁴²

And there’s more. In 2023 the Heritage Foundation quoted *Anthropology Now* in reporting, *“hundreds of studies dating back to the 1930s suggest that **anti-bias training doesn’t reduce bias.**”*

*“More recent studies reviewing hundreds of surveys of bias-training participants finds ‘weak immediate effects on **unconscious bias** and weaker effects on implicit bias.’ Consultants **Rik Kirkland and Iris Bohnet at McKinsey & Co.** wrote that, after reviewing diversity research from all over the world, they **‘did not find a single study that found that diversity training in fact leads to more diversity.’** . . . **Evidence on DEI programs’ effectiveness is not missing. The research demonstrates failure.**”⁴³*

Similar misrepresentations in other DEI strategic plans indicate that the entire Diversity Industrial Complex is a shaky **House of Cards** that is ready to collapse.

Conclusion

The Pentagon Should Follow the Constitution and Stop Discriminating

In October 2022, the **Solicitor General** of the United States, **Elizabeth Prelogar**, presented oral arguments on behalf of the Department of Defense in the case *Students for Fair Admissions vs. Harvard and the University of California*.⁴⁴

The military service academies were not parties to the lawsuit, but the Solicitor General argued that a racially diverse officer corps, whether commissioned through **ROTC** programs or the service academies, was a compelling national security interest.⁴⁵ The Solicitor General provided no evidence to prove that premise, but her presentation made it official: the Department of Defense supports racial discrimination in college admissions.

The Department of Justice is making the same argument in new litigation filed by student plaintiffs against the military service academies, even though the Supreme Court did not hesitate to apply its 2023 landmark decision to ROTC programs at Harvard and the University of North Carolina.⁴⁶

In the Pentagon, color-consciousness has replaced color-blindness. This is happening at a time when compelling evidence suggests that **meritocracy, non-discrimination, and the needs of the military must be restored as paramount values.**

Our military has serious problems but throwing good money after bad will not address the real issues. The Pentagon asked for **\$114 million** for more DEI programs, even without evidence that anything useful resulted from the previous subsidies of **\$86.5 million** in FY 2023 and **\$68 million** in FY 2022.⁴⁷

In contrast, many major companies have reduced or disbanded their DEI departments because they add no corporate value, and their activities are inconsistent with the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling against racial discrimination.⁴⁸

Integrity and Leadership to Change Course

A slide presentation at the DACODAI's meeting in December 2023 cited a 13-year-old MLDC recommendation asking Congress to mandate "**Diversity Leadership Core Competency**" at all levels of leadership. What the military really needs are sound, proven policies. Meritocracy and non-discrimination should be recognized as true strategic imperatives, not after-thoughts occasionally praised for the sake of appearances.

Our military also needs principled leaders who openly question the value of mandatory DEI programs that consciously discriminate based on race. As Prof. Anna Simons wrote, the range of adversaries we face today requires awareness of:

*"... both the first line of deterrence and the last line of defense: namely, **the integrity of the military itself**. . . Americans should do what we can to prevent the services from adopting policies that **alienate young people who want to volunteer** but who increasingly hesitate because they fear that political agendas are **taking precedence over the tough but meritocratic standards that enable them to trust authority and one another**. . . Leaders are the issue."⁴⁹*

Today's civilian and military leaders seem stuck in a time warp, conducting DEI business as usual. Looking at the DACODAI agenda, you would never know that in 2023, the Supreme Court unequivocally banned racial discrimination in the context of higher education. The Court also rejected stereotypical racial and ethnic categories that were devised by bureaucrats for different purposes more than four decades ago.

Nor is there any indication that Pentagon leaders are considering whether their own misguided policies,

which followed the advice of civilian business consultants, are worsening the recruiting crisis, undermining morale and public support for the All-Volunteer Force, and contributing to weakness in our armed forces, which must remain strong in a very dangerous world.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion are good things, but DEI programs that divide and demoralize are not.

A ship that is steered two degrees off course, without correction, eventually winds up in the wrong ocean. The DACODAI would better serve America by changing course and reinstating sound priorities – meritocracy, not diversity metrics, could restore confidence in our military and the willingness of young people to serve.

* * * * *

Endnotes

¹ More information about the Center for Military Readiness is available at www.cmrlink.org. CMR President Elaine Donnelly wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Law Professor Emeritus and retired Army Col. William A. Woodruff, who served as an Army Judge Advocate and is Legal Counsel for CMR.

² The Commission was not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), but an early decision was made to operate as if it were. The views of Commission members were far from monolithic, but differences in our opinions helped to ensure a complete record. The Commission heard from a wide variety of civilian and military witnesses of all ranks and conducted countless focus groups at military bases nationwide. Questions from commissioners with differing views strengthened the Commission’s Final Report.

³ [Executive Order 9981](#), signed by President Harry S. Truman on July 26, 1948. As the Commission determined, minority soldiers had proven themselves in battle and they were needed to fight in the Korean War.

⁴ As explained in Matt Davis’s [Project 100,000: The Vietnam War’s Cruel Experiment on American Soldiers](#) and Hamilton Gregory Spring’s article [McNamara’s Boys](#), Project 100,000 was one of the worst social experiments ever conducted in our military. Defense Secretary McNamara recruited and sent to Vietnam about 300,000 men who failed to meet minimum criteria for military service, both physically and mentally. Most had not passed the AFQT and were classified Category IV. Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty” was starting up, and military “opportunities” were offered to Cat IV personnel as a way out of poverty. Good intentions did not matter. These recruits, who were called “New Standards Men,” were killed in disproportionate numbers. Those who survived the war fared worse in their lives than civilian peers. America should not repeat the same type of social experiment, creating a cohort of people who are suspected of being less qualified, just like the “New Standards Men” of Vietnam.

⁵ Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, [All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way](#), Twentieth Century Fund, Inc., 1996. Excerpt: “*One major institution . . . contradicts the prevailing race paradigm. It is an organization unmatched in its level of racial integration. It is an institution unmatched in its broad record of black achievement. It is a world in which the Afro-American heritage is part and parcel of the institutional culture. It is the only place in American life where whites are routinely bossed by blacks. The institution is the U.S. Army.*” (pp. 1-2)

⁶ [From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century](#), Military Leadership Diversity Commission, Mar. 2011.

⁷ CMR Policy Analysis: [Biden Executive Order Empowers Permanent Diversity Industrial Complex](#), Jun. 7, 2023.

⁸ [Research Page](#) on the website of the Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity & Inclusion and the DACODAI [Charter](#), Oct. 23, 2022.

⁹ [5 U.S.C. § 3331](#) (Officers); [10 U.S.C. § 502](#) (Enlisted).

¹⁰ [Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard](#), 600 U. S. 181, 223 (2023) (“[a]t the heart of the Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection lies the simple command that the Government must treat citizens as individuals, not as simply components of a racial, religious, sexual or national class.”); *id.* at 231- 287 (detailing the historical and jurisprudential basis for the colorblind Constitution.) (Thomas, J. concurring); [University of California v. Bakke](#), 438 U. S. 265, 416 (1978) (“the proponents of Title VI assumed that the Constitution itself required a colorblind standard on the part of government.”) (Stevens, J. concurring in part and dissenting in part); [Loving v. Virginia](#), 388 U. S. 1, 10 (1967) (“The clear and central purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment was to eliminate all official . . . sources of invidious racial discrimination”); [Plessy v. Ferguson](#), [163 U. S. 537](#), 559 (1896) (“Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.”) (Harlan, J. dissenting); [The Slaughter House Cases](#), 83 U. S. 36, 72 (1873) (equal protection principles apply to all races and ethnicities). *Cf.* [Personnel Adm’r of Massachusetts v. Feeney](#), [442](#)

U. S. 256, 273 (1979) (noting “the settled rule that the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees equal laws, not equal results.”).

¹¹ David A. Thomas & Robin J. Ely, [Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity](#), Harvard Business Review 74, No. 5, September-October, 1996, pp. 79-90.

¹² [Report of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces](#), Nov. 15, 1992, CF 2.5.1, p. C-80: “Characteristics of Cohesion: Cohesion is the relationship that develops in a unit or group where (1) members share common values and experiences; (2) individuals in the group conform to group norms and behavior in order to ensure group survival and goals; (3) members lose their personal identify in favor of a group identity; (4) members focus on group activities and goals; (5) unit members become totally dependent on each other for the completion of their mission or survival; and (6) group members must meet all standards of performance and behavior in order not to threaten group survival. Cohesion can be negatively affected by the introduction of any element that detracts from the need for such key ingredients as mutual confidence, commonality of experience, and equitable treatment.”

¹³ Anna Simons, PhD, Heritage Foundation 2024 Index of Military Strength, “The Military and Society: A Refresher,” p. 66. Dr. Simons is the author of [The Company They Keep, Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces](#), Free Press, 1997.

¹⁴ William Darryl Henderson, Ph.D., National Defense University Press, [Cohesion – The Human Element in Combat](#), 4th Printing, 1993, pp. 22-24.

¹⁵ Walter E. Williams, Daily Signal, [What Can Racial Discrimination Explain?](#) Aug. 5, 2016.

¹⁶ [Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard](#), 600 U.S. 181, 216-217 (2023).

¹⁷ *Id.* At 291, (Gorsuch, J. *concurring*) (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹⁸ *Id.* quoting 43 Fed. Reg. 19269 (May 4, 1978). For a detailed analysis of the development of these racial and ethnic categories as they applied to affirmative action programs of government agencies, private businesses, colleges and universities, and state governments, see generally David E. Bernstein, *The Modern American Law of Race*, 94 S. CAL. L. REV. 171 (2021) (available at <https://southern.californialawreview.com/2021/08/24/the-modern-american-law-of-race-by-david-e-bernstein/>).

¹⁹ [Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard](#), 600 U.S. 181, 276 (2023) (Thomas, J. *concurring*).

²⁰ *Id.* at 276-277.

²¹ *Id.* At 277.

²² *Id.* at 291-292 (Gorsuch, J. *concurring*).

²³ *Id.* At 292.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ BERNSTEIN, DAVID E., Introduction CLASSIFIED: THE UNTOLD STORY OF RACIAL CLASSIFICATION IN AMERICA, at xi, (Bombardier Books, 2022) (available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4174375).

²⁸ Elaine Donnelly, RealClearDefense and *The Federalist*: [Our Military Needs Officers Chosen For Their Qualifications](#), Dec. 2, 2022.

²⁹ Steve Beynon, Military.com: [Army Sees Sharp Decline in White Recruits](#), Jan. 10, 2024, Micaela Burrow, Daily Caller: [Army Struggles For White Recruits Amid Recruiting Crisis And Diversity Push](#), Feb. 13, 2024, and Shawn Fleetwood, *The Federalist*, [White Men Don’t Want to Join an Army That Tells Them They Aren’t Wanted](#), Jan. 12, 2024.

³⁰ Micaela Burrow, Daily Caller: [EXCLUSIVE: ‘A Huge Blow’ – Decline in White Recruits Fueling the Military’s Worst-Ever Recruiting Crisis, Data Shows](#), Feb. 13, 2024.

³¹ [Memorandum](#) for HQ AETC/CC, Department of the Air Force, Subject: Officer Source of Commission Applicant Pool Goals, Aug. 9, 2022, and Micaela Burrow, Daily Caller: [EXCLUSIVE: Air Force Touts Plans To Track Promotions From A ‘Race, Equity And Gender Standpoint’](#).

³² Streiff, Red State: [Unexpectedly, the USAF Finds Itself With a Critical Shortage of Pilots While It Says It Has Too Many White Officers](#), Sept. 18, 2022.

³³ Wyatt Olson, Stars & Stripes: [Admiral Says Navy's Goal is 25 Percent Women in Each Ship, Squadron](#), May 15, 2015; Jonah Bennett, The Daily Caller, [Air Force Announces It Will Mandate Diversity Quotas in Candidate Pools for Key Positions](#), Oct. 2, 2016; Stephen Losey, *Air Force Times*, [Air Force Secretary's Diversity Plan Will Mean Quotas, Critics Say](#), Mar. 9, 2015; Bruce Fleming, RealClearDefense, [DEI Destroys Excellence, Military Cohesion at Service Academies](#), Jan. 18, 2024, and Jessica Chasmar, Fox News, [Air Force Academy Promotes Fellowship That Bans 'Cisgender' Men: 'This Program Isn't for You'](#), Sept. 23, 2023.

³⁴ Micaela Burrow, The Daily Caller, ['I Hire for Diversity': Pentagon Nominees Blocked by GOP Senator Are Pushing Left-Wing Initiatives to Reshape Military](#), Jun. 25, 2023.

³⁵ [The Miracle On The Hudson - The Full Story \(simpleflying.com\)](#), Jul. 24, 2023.

³⁶ Rebecca Kheel, Military.com, [Most Would Encourage Military Service but Confidence in Armed Forces Remains Low, Survey Finds](#), Nov. 30, 2023, and Richard Sisk, Military.com, [The Military Recruiting Outlook is Grim Indeed. Loss of Public Confidence, Political Attacks and the Economy Are All Taking a Toll](#), Jan. 22, 2024.

³⁷ Gallup News: [Confidence in U.S. Military Lowest in Over Two Decades](#), Jul. 31, 2023.

³⁸ [Executive Summary of the 2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength | The Heritage Foundation](#), Jan. 24, 2024, and CHQ Staff, [Under Biden the United States' Military Posture Must be Rated as 'Weak.'](#) Jan. 25, 2024.

³⁹ Dakota Wood, The Daily Signal: [Our Military Is Weak. That Should Scare You](#). Feb. 14, 2023.

⁴⁰ [Task Force One Navy Final Report](#), p. 10, and footnotes #1 and #2, p. 6, Jan. 2021.

⁴¹ Sheen S. Levine *et al.*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the US, [Ethnic Diversity Deflates Price Bubbles](#), Dec. 30, 2014. Quote highlighted on p. 1: "Market prices fit true values 58% better in diverse markets." TF1N revision, p. 6: "The statistics are important because diverse teams are 58 percent more likely than non-diverse teams to accurately assess a situation."

⁴² McKinsey & Company, ["Diversity Matters"](#), Feb. 2, 2015. Executive Summary quote on p. 1: "The companies in the top quartile of racial/ethnic diversity were 15 percent more likely to have financial returns that were above their national industry median." TF1N revision, p. 6: "[G]ender-diverse organizations are 15 percent more likely to outperform other organizations . . ." Also see Phillip Keuhlen, RealClearDefense, [Task Force One Navy Final Report: 'The Emperor's New Clothes' Redux](#), Dec. 6, 2023.

⁴³ Jonathan Butcher, Heritage.org, [DEI Has Failed; We Do Not Need More of It](#)," Jan. 20, 2023.

⁴⁴ [Students for Fair Admissions \(SFFA\) vs. Harvard and SFFA vs. the University of N. Carolina](#), 2023.

⁴⁵ [Prof. William A. Woodruff, The Federalist: No, the Supreme Court Did Not Carve Out a Military Exception in Race-Based Admissions](#), July 6, 2023.

⁴⁶ Reuters: [Biden Administration Defends West Point's Race-Conscious Admissions Policy](#), Nov. 24, 2024.

⁴⁷ Timothy Frudd, American Military News, [Pentagon Wants \\$114 Million for Diversity Programs](#), Nov. 22, 2023.

⁴⁸ Richard Vanderford, *Wall Street Journal*, [Corporate America Tweaks Diversity Initiatives Amid Pushback](#), Feb. 5, 2024, and Brit Morse, Inc.com, [Zoom Layoffs Target DEI Amid a Broader Pullback on Diversity Initiatives](#) Feb. 6, 2024.

⁴⁹ Simons, footnote #13, *supra*, p. 70.

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