

The U.S. Army and “the Problem of Race”: Afros, Race Consciousness, and Institutional Logic

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In late summer 1969, less than a month after a “race fight” between white and black soldiers at Fort Bragg in North Carolina sent twenty-five men to the hospital, an assistant secretary of the army dispatched a team to investigate a portion of the “war which [was] being fought every night” in soldiers’ barracks and bars, at army posts and in the towns that surrounded them, and within the U.S. military presence throughout the world.¹

Racial conflict in the U.S. Army was not new, and violence had accompanied racism and racist practices through the history of the American military. Senior officers in the late 1960s likely remembered some of the worst of it, the “harvest of disorder” that had exploded within the army during World War II. The most recent outbreak, however, seemed to them different in scope, in scale, and—most especially—in origin. This was not the segregated army of World War II, nor was it the army that had struggled with forced integration in the years following President Harry S. Truman’s 1948 executive order. Army officers believed they had made great progress toward racial equality, and the nation’s civilian black leaders overwhelmingly agreed. Both groups had frequently portrayed the military as a model for the rest of the nation, as an institution where color did not determine opportunity.²

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¹ On the war fought every night and the briefing officer’s participation, see James S. White, “An Assessment of Racial Tension in the Army,” Oct. 27, 1969, briefing, pp. 12, 16, ODCSPER [Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel], DA [Department of the Army] Briefing for the CINCUSAREUR [Commander in Chief, United States Army Europe], HRC 291.2: Race Permanent File (U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.). The assessment was conducted by direction of U.S. Army chief of staff William Westmoreland, and results were presented to him on September 18, 1969. *Ibid.*, 1.

² On the racial violence in the army during World War II, see Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, 1966), 348–79. On racial violence in the U.S. Army during World War I, see Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, 2010), esp. 90–94, 172; Lawrence Allen Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African American Press* (Columbia, Mo., 2011), 187–90; and James E. Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York, 1997), 2. Exec. Order No. 9981, 13 Fed. Reg. 4313 (July 28, 1948).

But after more than a decade of relative calm, racial skirmishes had broken out in the army following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968. The following August, at Long Binh Jail in Vietnam, a group of black soldiers had seized control of the stockade, burned buildings to smoldering embers, and beat a white inmate to death with a shovel. Over one hundred men, guards and inmates, were injured in that confrontation. The same year, in West Germany, two white G.I.s had stabbed to death three black soldiers. The list of violent events continued. Such conflict, more than concerns about civil rights and equal opportunity, forced the army to become serious about what leaders were beginning to call the “problem” of race.³

Members of the small group sent to Fort Bragg and to Fort Riley in August 1969 were instructed to talk to young enlisted men and evaluate the state of race relations in those locations and, by extension, at U.S. Army posts across the nation. Included in that small group of evaluators was John Kester, a brand-new deputy assistant secretary of defense. Kester likely seemed a good choice for the assignment. He had come to his current position by way of a clerkship with Supreme Court justice Hugo Black, and though he had just crossed the magic line of thirty (as in “don’t trust anyone over the age of”), he was relatively young. The fact that he was also white did not seem to register with the office of the secretary of the army, though it likely did with the enlisted men he interviewed. But no matter how his own racial identity may have shaped his findings, Kester meant to report what he heard. And what Kester passed on to his superiors was not what they—or he—had expected. “Time and again,” he informed them, discussions with enlisted personnel “of both races” had “turned to a subject . . . none of us had previously taken seriously: haircuts.”⁴

Perhaps more surprisingly, army leadership took Kester’s four-page memorandum on haircuts quite seriously. Why? At that enormously conflicted moment in American history, army leaders, like their counterparts in the navy, the Marine Corps, and the air force, worried that widespread racial conflict and the violence that often accompanied it within the military threatened not only the stability of military installations or units but also the ability of the U.S. military to defend the nation. Racial conflict fell near the top of the list of military challenges, even as the promised “light at the end of the tunnel” in Vietnam grew ever dimmer and antiwar protesters massed in the streets. But these men were unsure how to approach the problem of race. They did not know what to do.

Thus—given the high stakes of the problem and the low level of confidence about solutions—senior army leaders were willing to expend resources and think creatively. In their search for solutions, many rejected the color-blind approach previously endorsed by integrationists and civil rights advocates and accepted the race-conscious approach now embraced by many in the black movement for social justice. The specific programs these

³ Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 102–4, 112. See also “Crimes of Violence by Race charts” folder, Equal Opportunity Reporting files, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472 (National Archives, College Park, Md.). The term *problem*, whether it appears as the *Army’s race problem*, the *race problem*, the *problem of race*, *racial problems*, or simply a listing of *problems*, is used in documents from the era. For one example, see Arthur M. Sussman, Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of the Army: Subject, Race Relations in the Army–Vietnam and Thailand, Jan. 14, 1970, SEA RS 272 (U.S. Army Center of Military History).

⁴ White, “Assessment of Racial Tension in the Army,” 12. “Biographical Sketch: John G. Kester, Esq.,” *Historical Society of the District of Columbia Court*, https://dcchs.org/sb_pdf/biographical-sketch-john-g-kester/. John G. Kester, Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs): Subject, Haircuts, Sept. 5, 1969, p. 1, SEA RS 249, 1969 (U.S. Army Center of Military History).

military leaders crafted or endorsed took multiple forms, with quite different approaches coexisting and overlapping. But most immediately, key leaders focused on what young service members said was important. And in an era of cultural nationalism, as many men and women claimed a distinct black identity, visible signs and symbols of cultural identity were crucial. As Kester noted in his memorandum (in the middle of a paragraph on the “modern young man” and individualism), “to black soldiers the Afro style is a mark of self-confidence and pride.” Hair mattered.⁵

The problem of race provided justification, but the problem of hair stretched well beyond the Afro style. Militaries depend on policy and regulations—regulations that were laid out in often-excruciating detail, subject to enforcement, and universally applicable. Thus, if the army decides to recognize the importance of black identity and accept the use of cultural symbols, it cannot limit the use of cultural symbols to African Americans alone. When the army began to accept symbols of black identity, it opened the door to a variety of claims about identity and expression that went well beyond the decision’s original intent—and sometimes created a new set of racial conflicts. Hair, though, remained the central symbol of identity and expression and the main subject of contestation.

Focusing on hair policy in the U.S. Army is not just a historian’s conceit, a way to catch readers’ attention and then cushion the intricacies of an institutional analysis. Hair absorbed an enormous amount of military time and attention. Struggles over hair reached from the lowliest private to his chief of staff and service secretary. They commanded resources of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the Department of Defense. They led to courts-martial, were the subject of federal court decisions and Supreme Court attention, and bedeviled noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and members of Congress alike.

Nonetheless, it is not simply the extraordinary attention paid to hair that justifies analysis. Hair, and the army’s institutional attempts to manage it, reveals something fundamental about the process of social change—not only in regard to the question of race and social justice in the Vietnam era but also about the roles that institutions play and the ways historians of social change need to take them into account.

Historians of the African American struggle for equal rights and social justice largely agree that the sources of change lie in grassroots action. People made demands; they did the hard work of organization; they preached and they educated; they marched and they did, literally, fight for change. The significance of those acts, however, is fully acknowledged. Less well understood is the other piece of the process.⁶

While change originates in the struggles, protests, and demands of the oppressed and their allies, such demands are rarely the end point, and few activists see them as such. To make a fundamental difference, change must be enacted into law or translated into policy, and with sufficient mechanisms of enforcement to make the change significant. Change has to percolate through culture. And most fundamentally, change must be managed

⁵ On black resistance to the use of racial identification in the U.S. military and on Department of Defense regulations to that end, see Morris J. MacGregor Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940–65* (Washington, 1981), 535; and Kester, Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of the Army: Subject, Haircuts, Sept. 5, 1969, p. 3, SEA RS 249, 1969.

⁶ The historical literature stressing the significance of grassroots activism in the struggle for civil rights and racial justice is enormous. Some key works are Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, 1995); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995); and Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, 2008).

through the institutions of American life, including its workplaces, its economic institutions, its purveyors of law and order, its schools and universities, its media, and, in this case, the U.S. Army—a massive and highly visible institution that touched the lives of tens of millions of Americans in the latter half of the twentieth century.⁷

If we accept the notion that institutions manage social change, what must historians take into account in analyzing that process? I contend that it matters greatly which individuals are in positions of leadership. Much more fundamentally, however, the limits on and opportunities for change are determined by the institution's definition of its basic mission and purpose; by the regulations and practices and procedures that govern its actions; by its understanding of its culture and history—in sum, by a sort of institutional logic. By tracing the ways one branch of the U.S. military responded to soldiers' demands about hair in the context of its concern about racial conflict, we can see how the nature of the institution shaped its attempts and structured its failures and successes.⁸

This article focuses on the U.S. Army, the largest and most diverse of the nation's military services. It does not look more generically at the U.S. military, for each branch of the U.S. armed forces has its own institutional bureaucracy, history and culture, practices and regulations, all of which combined to shape the way it defines problems and responds to them. Such institutional differences, however, do not mean that each service functions in a vacuum. Army leaders who struggled with “the problem of race” were well aware of the actions taken by their counterparts in the other service branches, and vice versa. Soldiers and sailors and marines and airmen were commonly aware of—and often angry over—what they experienced as inequities among military branches. And the Department of Defense, itself concerned about racial issues, exerted authority over the military as a whole. Thus, without conflating “military” and “army,” it is important not to artificially isolate the army from the broader military to which it belongs.

This article also, in charting “the problem of race,” relies on the army's Vietnam War-era treatment of race as a black-white dyad. Although official documents sometimes briefly acknowledged or discussed members of other racial or ethnic groups (Puerto Ricans; Mexicans/“Spanish”/Chicanos; American Indians), without exception they quickly returned to black-white relations.⁹

Finally, as this article focuses on a single service, it also focuses on a single gender. Women fall outside its bounds. Until 1978, women belonged to a separate Women's Army Corps (WAC), which, in the late 1960s, constituted an even smaller percentage (0.8) of enlisted active-duty strength than the 2 percent limit set by law until 1967. Racial conflict—even some violence—surfaced among the WACs, but army leaders did not see

⁷ For an analysis of institutional action, see Matthew Johnson, “Managing Racial Inclusion: The Origins and Early Implementation of Affirmative Action Admissions at the University of Michigan,” *Journal of Policy History*, 29 (June 2017), 462–89. For a brief discussion of the military response in Vietnam and its limits, see Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 131–38. For an analysis of the institutional culture of a different branch of the U.S. armed forces, see Aaron B. O'Connell, *Underdogs: Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

⁸ On how other disciplines approach the study of institutions, see, for example, Patricia H. Thornton and William Ocasio, “Institutional Logics,” in *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, ed. Royston Greenwood (London, 2017), 99–129. For a historical study that directly engages theories of institutional culture (more closely related to my use of the phrase “institutional logic”), see Andrew Hill, “Culture and the U.S. Army: Military Innovation and Military Culture,” *Parameters*, 45 (Spring 2015), 85–98.

⁹ For an example of a reference to other groups, see Charles R. Wallis, undated and untitled manuscript excerpt, [early 1970s], p. 8, chap. 5, “Race Relations in the Army” folder, box 1, Charles R. Wallis Papers (U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, Pa.). Lt. Col. Charles Wallis was writing from Fort Carson, which had a sizeable population of enlisted men of “Spanish descent.”

what was happening within the WAC as nearly so significant, in part because they did not worry that racial conflict among WACs (with a peak strength in Vietnam that never surpassed 159) would disrupt the combat readiness of the army. Thus, as far as the army was concerned, this is a story of men, hair, and the problem of race.¹⁰

As army leaders sought to manage what they saw as a growing racial crisis in the late 1960s, they were quick to point to its civilian origins. And while that move too often excused both institutional and individual racism, they did have a point. This was an era of uprisings and racial violence in civilian society, a time when disillusioned black youth embraced movements for separatism and cultural nationalism and when white resistance emerged redoubled, taking new and powerful forms. To be clear: racism within the army was undeniable, no matter how completely official policies supported equal opportunity, and black servicemen responded to their immediate situation. Nonetheless, the broader struggles and movements of the civilian world shaped the ways that reluctant, short-term soldiers understood the meanings of racial identity and the goals of their struggles. As Kimberley L. Phillips notes, black service members deployed black power “as a form of self-defense within a racialized military.”¹¹

Claims about black rights and identity—and, critically, white resistance to them—did not end when men and women put on military uniforms. Racial conflict intensified as large numbers of young men, many of them very much against their will, were inducted into the army during the increasingly unpopular U.S. war in Vietnam. Many of these soldiers, of all races and ethnicities, were from poor or working-class backgrounds, and many had little experience with others who were not like themselves.¹²

These young men were forced together in an environment that required integration of racial groups that went far beyond the workplace or the classroom or even the neighborhood. They had to eat together, sleep in the same room, train together, and rely on one another. Sometimes it worked. But, in general, to offer an understatement, it was not going well.

¹⁰ Female soldiers’ struggles over race and hair policy have drawn national attention more recently. See Lori L. Tharps, “When Black Hair Is against the Rules,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2014, p. A25. On Women’s Army Corps (WAC) history, see Bettie J. Morden, *The Women’s Army Corps, 1945–1978* (Washington, 1990), 248, 304. On total enlisted strength of the army, see William Gardner Bell, *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1969* (Washington, 1973), 34. In 1967 women could be assigned to about one-third of army military occupational specialties, virtually all in the traditionally female fields of health care, administration, and communication. Until 1973, individual positions were designated by gender (M, F, or I [Interchangable]), as the civilian market had done before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For restrictions on women’s military service, see Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 140–41, 155–56. The Army Nurse Corps, not all of which was female, was distinct from the WAC. See Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War* (Baltimore, 2010).

¹¹ On black power and cultural nationalism, see William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago, 1992); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2006); Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, 2004); Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill, 2012), esp. 224; and Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 139–49. On African American service members during the Vietnam War era, see Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York, 2010); Gerald F. Goodwin, “Race in the Crucible of War: African American Soldiers and Race Relations in the ‘Nam,”” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio University, 2014); Herman Graham III, *The Brothers’ Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience* (Gainesville, 2003); and Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York, 1984). On the black media and the Vietnam War, see Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*.

¹² On the backgrounds of Vietnam War military personnel, see Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, 1993).

CRIMES OF VIOLENCE BY RACE					
PERIOD: 1 JUL 70 - 31 MAY 71					
OFFENSE	CAU vs CAU	NEG vs NEG	CAU vs NEG	NEG vs CAU	TOTAL
MURDER	7	5	2	9	23
ATT MURDER	13	5	4	13	35
MANSLAUGHTER	0	1	0	2	3
AGGR ASSAULT	102	29	28	189	348
ROBBERY	4	0	0	48	52
DISTURBANCES	1	0	1	19	21
TOTAL	127	40	35	280	482

As U.S. Army leaders became concerned about the rising incidence of interracial violence, various offices attempted to gather data. However, charts such as this one, submitted in 1971 by an unidentified unit in Vietnam, may have done more harm than good. This respondent included all interracial conflict, not simply attacks deemed racially motivated, and did not distinguish between attacks that were provoked (by use of racial epithets, for example) and those that targeted uninvolved soldiers based simply on their race. *Courtesy National Archives, College Park, Md.*

Racial conflict in the army mirrored, in many ways, the conflict exploding in civilian society from which the men came, and it was provoked by whites and blacks alike. But young black soldiers had particular reason to be angry. Drafted in higher percentages than their white counterparts, they were also disproportionately channeled into combat. Even the “moderate” *Baltimore Afro-American*, in March 1966, called attention to the equally disproportionate rate of black deaths in Vietnam, and by 1968, radical groups such as the Black Panthers were describing the draft as an instrument of “genocide” against blacks. As young black men—many highly conscious of the racism that pervaded American society—encountered racism within the military, whether in Vietnam, the United States, or elsewhere in the world, they had little patience for what they found.¹³

Racial violence exploded on military installations during the late 1960s and early 1970s, both within the United States and in Germany, Okinawa, Korea, Thailand, and the Republic of Vietnam. Violence often spilled into the streets of the surrounding towns and cities. And as stories of conflict, whether of discrimination against black soldiers, of “race fights,” or of racially motivated assaults, found their way to civilian realms, they prompted public outrage and political pressure to solve the problem. Media coverage of the military highlighted racial violence. Mothers wrote to their congressional representatives, or even to the president. The NAACP, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Urban League all became involved. Such external pressures mattered in pushing the military to act. And some army leaders claimed a moral commitment to confront racial discrimi-

¹³ Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 20–21, 13–14. On the *Baltimore Afro-American*’s notice of the disproportionate rate of black deaths in the war, see *ibid.*, 16. On young black men losing patience with racism, see *ibid.*, 17, 36.

nation and enforce equal opportunity standards—the issues they believed underlay the conflict. As the secretary of the army told attendees at the Department of the Army Race Relations Conference in November 1970, the army should be “society’s model of fair treatment,” in which “all soldiers are treated fairly not because it is necessary, but because it is right.”¹⁴

Most critically, however, army leaders and strategic planners saw “the problem of race” as demanding their full attention and extraordinary resources because they were afraid that—as the U.S. military fought, in Vietnam, a war it would not win, at a time when escalating Cold War tensions and the growing instability of the Middle East were worsening an already volatile and dangerous strategic environment—racial conflict within the military could undermine its combat readiness and, thus, the security of the United States. As the conclusions presented following the army’s major conference on race relations (convened by order of the army chief of staff) stated bluntly: “Racial conflict is a problem which the Army must acknowledge and respond to in order to continue to remain a combat effective force.” In army terms, the stakes could not have been higher.¹⁵

In response, leaders sought solutions. Theirs, of course, was not the first race-related military initiative of the decade. The President’s Committee on Equality of Opportunity in the Armed Forces, created by John F. Kennedy at the behest of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1962, had focused on discrimination affecting service members and their families in areas surrounding military installations; McNamara’s actions signaled a new seriousness about race in the Department of Defense. McNamara’s 1966 Department of Defense initiative, Project 100,000, had not specifically named African American youth in its stated goal of offering a route out of poverty for those who otherwise did not qualify for military service—but close to 40 percent of those who served through this program were African American. The difference is that those efforts were not generated within the army, and they were not born from an internal sense of crisis. In July 1967, when the secretary of defense received a top-secret briefing on Vietnam soldiers’ morale, he heard about the use of “marihuana” and narcotics, the extent of the black market, and of courts-martial rates—but not a word about race. Just two years later, by late summer 1969, both the army chief of staff and the secretary of the army would put race second only to the war itself in their catalog of concerns.¹⁶

¹⁴ Extraordinary levels of racial violence are documented in U.S. Army serious incident reports, investigations by the office of the inspector general, and mandatory monthly race relations surveys of army commands. See, for example, “Detailed Breakout of Disturbances,” case 70-20, box 22, Case Inv Files, 1967–73, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] IG [Inspector General] Reports (National Archives); “Draft of Report to DA [Department of the Army],” typescript with penciled corrections, “Race Relations in the Army” folder, box 1, Wallis Papers; Stanley R. Resor, keynote address, p. 2, *Department of the Army Race Relations Conference, Fort Monroe, Virginia, 17 to 20 November, 1970* (U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center). A race relations information packet for the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson concluded that the army must take action not simply to strengthen itself but also because doing so is “proper and right.” 4th Infantry Division (Mech) race relation information packet, [1971], Racial Harmony Council folder, box 1, Wallis Papers.

¹⁵ “After Action Report: Department of the Army Race Relations Conference,” p. 15, *Department of the Army Race Relations Conference*.

¹⁶ On the President’s Committee on Equality of Opportunity in the Armed Forces, see MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 535–49. On Project 100,000, see Appy, *Working-Class War*, 32–33; and Bernard D. Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, 2006), 135–37. Black media’s divided response to Project 100,000 appears in Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 49–50; “MACV J-1 U.S. Forces Morale,” pp. 1, 280, briefings given to the secretary of defense, Saigon, South Vietnam, July 7 and 8, 1967, SEA RS 300a (U.S. Army Center of Military History); Stanley R. Resor, keynote address to Association of the United States Army, Oct. 13, 1969, HRC 350.001: Speeches (U.S. Army Center of Military History).

Most army attempts to manage the problem of race derived from the traditional approaches of a military bureaucracy: a unit on race relations was incorporated into basic combat training; a new position, race relations officer, was created. A few partook of the weirdness of an era in which the army experimented with psychotropic research and embraced insights from the human potential movement. Others, such as the developing affirmative action and equal opportunity programs, would continue over the ensuing decades and prove successful. But underlying these divergent approaches was a coherent assumption. The army, as an institution, rejected color blindness. It adopted a highly race-conscious approach to the problem it had identified.¹⁷

Army secretary Stanley Resor clearly embraced a race-conscious position in a major speech to the army's professional organization in fall 1969, soon after Kester's report landed on his desk. Some leaders, Resor told his audience, will say, "with the best of intentions, 'for me, there's only one color, and that's o.d. [olive drab].'" That claim, the secretary acknowledged, still captured the army's "unwavering policy" of treating all soldiers with "equal fairness regardless of race." But, he made clear, "putting black and white citizens in green uniforms" does not mean that their different backgrounds, experiences, and outlooks can be ignored: "a Negro in uniform does not cease to be a Negro and become a soldier instead. He becomes a Negro soldier."¹⁸

Resor did not fully depart from conventional wisdom. He reiterated the army's usual claim that it was not "an institution of social reform," emphasized the importance of "a neat appearance, a military bearing, hard work and discipline" for all troops, and downplayed the new "racial consciousness" of young black soldiers as part of a "larger striving for individuality" that transcended racial lines. But, in emphasizing that officers must abandon notions of an "o.d." army for one that acknowledged the "Negro soldier," the secretary of the army made a paradigm-shifting point: in addition to combating racism (a negative force), the army needed to define racial identity as a potentially positive force—or at least one that had to be acknowledged.¹⁹

Such claims were not restricted to civilian leadership. Chief of Staff William Westmoreland, not one for the soft touch on personnel issues, explained in a cable about race relations sent for distribution to army commanders worldwide that "the Army must become more sensitive to the soldier's desire to be recognized for his personal worth, dignity and pride." At Fort Collins, a race relations guide creatively summarized the army's new message: non-white soldiers should not be expected to renounce their "ethnic and cultural heritage and identity" to serve in the army. While Westmoreland might not have recognized that statement, in the context of the late 1960s his endorsement of "dignity" and "pride" did, at least implicitly, affirm the importance of the symbols of black pride and black identity.²⁰

¹⁷ On affirmative action and equal opportunity in the U.S. Army, see Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (New York, 1996).

¹⁸ Resor, keynote address to Association of the United States Army, Oct. 13, 1969, HRC 350.001: Speeches. Some of Stanley R. Resor's comments on race are drawn directly from Lt. Col. James S. White's briefing, which Resor had received on September 27, 1969. White, "Assessment of Racial Tension in the Army," 18. This briefing reached well beyond Washington, D.C., to commanders throughout Europe and Southeast Asia.

¹⁹ Resor, keynote address to Association of the United States Army, Oct. 13, 1969, HRC 350.001: Speeches.

²⁰ *Stars and Stripes* Washington Bureau, "Army Must Be Tuned to Personal Worth: Westy Views Race Relations," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Oct. 8, 1969, p. 7; 4th Infantry Division (Mech) race relation information packet, p. 4, Racial Harmony Council folder, box 1, Wallis Papers. Westmoreland's memo was emphasized in all commands. See Maj. Gen. Ben Sternberg, USARHAW [United States Army Hawaii] to Gen. Ralph E. Haines Jr., CINCUSARPAC [commander in chief, United States Army Pacific], Nov. 24, 1969, case 70-20, box 22, Case Inv Files, 1967-73, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] IG [Inspector General] Reports.

Chief among these was hair. What John Kester had discovered in Georgia and Kansas was echoed by soldiers—and by marines, sailors, and airmen—worldwide. In May 1969 *Jet* magazine reported on a “flood” of letters from black soldiers, who complained that though they were banned from wearing “Afro-bush” styles, white officers “look the other way” when “shaggy-haired white soldiers pass.” Complaints were not restricted to white officers; Afro-wearing privates were increasingly willing to dismiss older black noncommissioned officers, many with little sympathy for their claims, as Uncle Toms.²¹

When, following army-wide instructions from Westmoreland, the commander at Fort Bragg set up interracial seminars in late 1969, participants were reportedly preoccupied with the “haircut problem.” More than one-fifth of soldiers surveyed at Fort Carson, Colorado, in March 1970 listed haircuts as their top concern. Almost two-thirds put hair in the top four. (For perspective: March 1970 was less than ten months after the battle of Hamburger Hill, and stories on the My Lai massacre—made public in November 1969—still appeared on the front pages of American newspapers.) A United Press International story in May 1970 quoted an unspecified report on army race relations: “there probably is no single thing that exacerbates and fosters ill will more than the topic of haircuts.”²²

The journalist Wallace Terry, who had interviewed hundreds of black soldiers in Vietnam between 1967 and 1969 as *Time* magazine’s deputy bureau chief in Saigon, testified at a congressional hearing on racism in the military that “the question of hair” was critically important. Listing the problems identified by black servicemen, Terry ranked hair below only slow promotions and disproportionately dangerous assignments. In Germany the Afro was a frequent topic in *Stars and Stripes*, especially in letters to the editors, and in 1971 a black army deserter explained, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, that he had deserted due to racial discrimination, the prime evidence of which was . . . haircuts.²³

In most of these cases, observers agreed, army hair policies had exacerbated racial tensions between black and white soldiers. Despite army hair regulations’ uniformity—or at least the intention of uniformity—they nonetheless drew charges of unfairness and preferential treatment. White soldiers at Fort Carson complained that “current policy permits the Negro soldier to remain inconspicuous in the civilian community while complying” with regulations (because Afros could compress to appear acceptable), while black soldiers in Vietnam told Terry that if “you grew your hair too long, never as long as some White boys are able to wear their hair and get away with it, you risk thirty days in jail,” in part because (as an army staff sergeant in Germany explained), under uniform

²¹ “People Are Talking About,” *Jet*, May 1, 1969, p. 42, quoted in Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 200; Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 127–28.

²² On the interracial seminars at Fort Bragg, see Charles K. Nulsen Jr., “Rap It Out,” *Army Digest*, Nov. 1970, p. 8, issue in “Racial Literature 1971” files, box 4, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472. Charles K. Nulsen Jr. was deputy chief of staff at Fort Bragg. On the March 1970 survey, see Commanding General, Fort Carson, to Commanding General, USA5 Fort Sheridan, relations briefing for secretary of the army, Jan. 1971, pp. 6–7, “Race Relations: Briefing” folder, box 1, Wallis Papers. Hair was listed as the top complaint among 25.3% of nonwhites and 17.6% of whites. See “Hair Situation in Nation’s Armed Forces Varies with the Location,” *Brownsville (TX) Herald*, May 20, 1970, p. 24. For the same United Press International article, see “The Long and Short of Service ‘Hair’ Rules,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 30, 1970, p. 10.

²³ Wallace Terry testimony, edited transcript, Nov. 16–18, 1971, in *Congressional Record*, 92 Cong., 2 sess., Oct. 13, 1972, pp. 36583–89, esp. 36583; “Die Armee schafft sich immer neue Neger” (The army keeps creating new Negroes), *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), June 21, 1971, p. 32.

regulations, “with the same length hair, black hair sticks out from cap while white hair doesn’t.”²⁴

But for most young black servicemen, the symbolism of the Afro mattered more than the potentially unfair results of uniform regulations. As a senior air force noncommissioned officer in Wiesbaden, Germany, put it in his letter to the editors of *Stars and Stripes*, “the Afro look” gives young black men “a feeling of completeness far deeper than an unthinking individual would believe.”²⁵

Claims about the significance of the Afro were made in American popular culture, asserted in informal conversations among service members, and debated in military policy. In late 1970, when the *Army Digest* discussed army efforts to address racial conflict, it broke no new ground in identifying the Afro as a key element of young black soldiers’ “desire to be identified with a new black pride, for which they are constantly seeking historical evidence and visible symbolism.” Breaking free of “the white man’s culture,” the author wrote, “means feeling black pride, regaining manhood, and a type of soul-cleansing that they cannot otherwise obtain by continuing in the ways of their forebears.”²⁶

Thus, as military officials came to understand and then to inform one another, the Afro was not simply a haircut. It was an expression of black pride, the most visible of the cultural symbols that had come to matter a great deal to young black servicemen. Maj. Gen. Woodrow W. Vaughn, who first authorized the wearing of the Afro in Germany, endorsed it as “one of the most important if not the most important matters of concern to the Negro soldier . . . a source of great pride and identity to the Negro.” (As context, Vaughn also warned army officers in the same memorandum not to refer to black soldiers as “Nigger” or “Boy.”) L. Howard Bennett, the acting deputy secretary of defense, who led a Department of Defense trip to evaluate race relations in Southeast Asia in 1969, explained in his widely circulated final report that the young black man

is demanding recognition of himself as B*L*A*C*K (not ersatz white), different but completely equal. He is groping for a cultural identity and a set of black- (not white) developed and black- (not white) approved norms and goals upon which to establish his racial individuality and identity, hence the Afro, the dashiki, the black power handshake and salute, slave bracelets, etc.²⁷

In a similar vein, during the first court-martial case over an Afro hairstyle (in which air force airman first class August Doyle of Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico was charged in late 1969 with failing to obey a legal order to cut his hair), the expert witness Charles Becknell portrayed the Afro as a constitutionally protected form of communication. But Becknell, who was a historian, repeatedly returned to what he described as “our newly emerging black culture.” Under slavery, he explained, cutting a man’s hair down

²⁴ Commanding General, Fort Carson, to Commanding General, USA5 Fort Sheridan, relations briefing for secretary of the army, Jan. 1971, pp. 6–7, “Race Relations: Briefing” folder, box 1, Wallis Papers; Wallace Terry testimony, Nov. 16–18, 1971, edited transcript, in *Congressional Record*, 92 Cong., 2 sess., Oct. 13, 1972, p. 36589; Charles Howard, “Afro Hair: Symbol of the Times,” letter to the editor, *Stars and Stripes*, July 29, 1970, p. 12.

²⁵ Donald R. Evans, “Likes ‘Afro’ Style,” letter to the editor, *Stars and Stripes*, Aug. 9, 1969, p. 12. See also “Are Hair Regs Unfair?,” *ibid.*, June 4, 1971, p. 20.

²⁶ Nulsen, “Rap It Out,” 7.

²⁷ Woodrow W. Vaughn is quoted in “Army OKs ‘Neat’ Afro Haircuts, but Hippie Styles Are Out,” *Alexandria (LA) Daily Town Talk*, May 6, 1970, p. C7. For the rejection of racial epithets, see “Afro Haircuts OK for Negro Soldiers,” *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 8, 1970, p. 14. “Report of the Joint Office of the Secretary of Defense–White House–Military Departments Base Visits to Southeast Asia,” [Jan. 1970], p. 4, copy in “Racial Literature, 1971” folder, box 4, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472.

to the skin helped “distinguish him as a slave.” The Afro, in contrast, was an “assertion of manhood.” Becknell’s call back to the injustice of slavery was likely tactical, even as he strongly believed in his claims about manhood. In that courtroom, Becknell was not likely to help Doyle’s case by explaining that Afros (or “naturals”) had emerged in the mid-1960s not only as a sign of black pride but also as a rejection of white standards of appropriateness or beauty.²⁸

When asked on cross-examination what percentage of “Negro American males” wear Afro haircuts, Becknell replied: “Well, I’m not trying to be sarcastic, but there are no Negroes wearing Afro haircuts. The people that wear Afros are determined as being black.” Becknell’s participation would end with Airman Doyle’s initial conviction, but his comments were widely reported, and similar statements were heard as Doyle’s ACLU-sponsored appeals worked their way to a Supreme Court denial of *certiorari* in 1971.²⁹

By the cusp of the 1970s, military officials commonly included hair policy in their race relations efforts, sometimes assigning it great importance. After racial clashes at the Marine Corps Camp Lejeune and in Hawaii during the summer of 1969 left one dead and thirty-one injured, the Marine Corps commandant sent a message to all commands authorizing the Afro. (Confronted with an image of the approved U.S. Marine Corps Afro at the Camp Lejeune barbershop, a black combat veteran responded: “That ain’t no Afro.”) Word of the Marine Corps policy circulated, in part through extensive news coverage in military publications. An army representative assessing interracial relations in Southeast Asia the following November found black soldiers complaining that they were “harassed” about haircuts and asking about the applicability of the Marine Corps message on hair.³⁰

Not long afterward, in November 1969, the army’s commander in Hawaii issued “guidance” to “insure that reasonable ‘Afro-natural’ hairstyles” were allowed in his command. In Vietnam, after black soldiers complained to Bennett’s Department of Defense team about commanders prohibiting “the ‘Afro’ or ‘Bush’ hair cuts,” the commanding general of the USARV [United States Army Vietnam] announced that “Afro-bush” and “mod” styles were allowed, so long as they “conformed to prescribed USARV standards.” The following spring, the head of the European theater’s army support command issued his own authorization of the Afro style. A small-town U.S. newspaper’s headline on the shift correctly identified the larger point: “Army OKs ‘Neat’ Afro Haircuts, but Hippie Styles Are Out.”³¹

²⁸ Record of special court-martial of airman first class August Doyle, Dec. 8–10, 1969, pp. 118–25, folder f-7, box 1348, American Civil Liberties Union Papers (Princeton University Library, Princeton, N. J.). On the symbolic meaning of August Doyle’s hairstyle, see *Doyle v. Koelbl*, 434 F2d 1014 (1970), p. 37, folder f-8, *ibid.*; Charles Becknell interview by Beth Bailey, Oct. 1, 2015, audiotape (in Beth Bailey’s possession).

²⁹ Becknell interview. Record of special court-martial of airman first class August Doyle, Dec. 8–10, 1969, p. 118–25, folder f-7, box 1348, American Civil Liberties Union Papers. Joel M. Gora to August F. Doyle, April 22, 1971, folder f-3, *ibid.*

³⁰ “Black Marines May ‘Go Afro’ within Limits,” *Greenville (MS) Delta Democrat-Times*, Sept. 3, 1969, p. 1. The Marine Corps commandant also recognized the black power salute as a gesture of “recognition and unity,” while banning it from official ceremonies. “Official OK on Afro Haircuts Makes It Rough on Black Marines,” *Greenwood (SC) Index-Journal*, Sept. 4, 1969, p. 13; Sussman, Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of the Army: Subject, Race Relations in the Army–Vietnam and Thailand, Jan. 14, 1970, p. 5, SEA RS 272; “Medium ‘Afro’ Haircuts OK,” *Army Times* [1969], clipping, HRC 727: Hair Styles and Beards (U.S. Army Center of Military History).

³¹ “After Action Report on Visit of Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Civil Rights),” Nov. 30, 1969, “Visit of Mr. Howard Bennett” folder, box 1, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472; “After Action Report on Mr. L. Howard Bennett,” Dec. 8, 1969, *ibid.* For the policy approval from the deputy chief of staff, see Verne L. Bowers, Dec. 8, 1969, memo, *ibid.*; Sternberg to Haines, Nov. 24, 1969, case 70-20, box 22, Case Inv Files, 1967–73, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] IG [Inspector General] Reports; “Army OKs ‘Neat’ Afro Haircuts, but Hippie Styles Are Out.”

In other words, the army was concerned about managing claims of black pride and racial identity, not with accommodating itself to white youth culture. And by 1970, one point had become clear in both public discussion and internal communications: young black soldiers valued what they defined as black culture and meant to claim a black identity—most often, and most visibly, by growing their hair into an Afro style. Such alternate claims of identity, which merely by existing challenged the primary identity of soldier, and such visible rejections of uniformity, which signaled that challenge, did not mesh easily into army ways or with army values. (Those “ways” and “values” were not racially neutral; the term for the uniform haircut—a “whitewall” or “white sidewall”—clearly referred to white skin and was a slang term for white soldiers.) So how did the army attempt to reconcile such claims of black identity with the traditional logic and practices of the institution?³²

Here both organizational structure and standard procedure would come into play. The U.S. Army is a massive institution. Though down from its height of 1.5 million active-duty personnel in 1968, in 1970 the army comprised more than 1.3 million active-duty members, with the Army Reserve and the National Guard raising the total to almost 2 million. Army organization is complex, the subject of endless flow charts that carefully illustrate lines of authority and divisions of responsibility. From major commands down to individual soldiers, responsibilities are specified in detail. In 1970, for example, the army counted almost 450 “military occupational specialties” for individual assignment, including 02H Oboe Player; 94C Meat Cutter; and 27C Combat Missile Repair. Thus the way the problem was defined would dictate which elements of the army would be responsible for solutions. The “problem of race” would find purchase throughout both institutional and operational elements, but the initial organization-wide proposals centered on the Afro came from the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES), or what is more commonly known as the PX (post exchange).³³

The significance of the Afro was initially claimed by servicemen: Afros, to most young black soldiers, were symbols of identity and black pride. Army leaders, acknowledging such claims, were willing to experiment with more lenient policies on Afros and other cultural symbols, although often reluctantly and as only one among many attempts to solve the broadening racial crisis. (I hasten to add, here, that the Vietnam War did continue to overshadow all other concerns, with the Cold War not far behind.) In turn, AAFES leaders had their own reading of the issue, one in keeping with their assigned role of providing consumer goods to service personnel on U.S. military installations throughout the world. As they saw it, black soldiers who faced post exchange barbers with little knowledge of black hair and shelves full of shampoos that promised to “bring out the highlights” and “natural softness” of their hair felt excluded within the army. That problem, AAFES leaders were confident, they could solve.³⁴

³² On the use of the term *whitewalls* for the uniform haircut, see Hubert J. Erb, “Army in Europe Disturbed by ‘Racial Confrontations,’” *Fond du Lac (wi) Commonwealth Reporter*, Sept. 8, 1970, p. 8.

³³ David Coleman, “U.S. Military Personnel 1954–2014,” *HistoryinPieces.com*, <http://historyinpieces.com/research/us-military-personnel-1954-2014>; William Gardner Bell, ed., *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1970* (Washington, 1973), 54–60; “U.S. Army Military Occupational Specialties Vietnam War Era,” *American War Library*, <http://www.americanwarlibrary.com/vietnam/vwamos.htm>.

³⁴ “10 Gone, Groovy Shampoos of the 1960s,” July 20, 2016, *MeTV*, <http://www.metv.com/stories/shampoos-of-the-1960s>. On the expansion of the Army and Air Force Exchange Service during the early 1970s, see Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, 2011).

As the spokesperson for the AAFES, Col. John Florio, explained to the assembled officers at the first Department of the Army Race Relations Conference in late 1970, AAFES “is aware that providing products and services required by these important customers [black service personnel and their dependents]” helps fulfill the charge to improve race relations set forth by the secretary of the army in his October 1969 speech. Florio attributed some of the success he claimed to “greater command interest.” Greater command interest, institutionally, translated into resources and increased support.³⁵

In true bureaucratic style, AAFES had begun by researching black consumer desires (in the words of its report, “extensive research was made”). AAFES personnel were sent to observe what black patrons bought in New York, Washington, Atlanta, Houston, Detroit, and Dallas department stores, where they also surveyed the “stockage of black-oriented products.” AAFES representatives scrutinized national advertising aimed at African Americans. They solicited information from “major producers of toiletries” about “Negro customer usage and preferences.” They visited U.S. post exchanges to obtain “black customer comment and recommendations.” In the end, they produced a detailed list of “Merchandise in Support of Negro Customers” that specified more than two hundred personal care items (including Ebonaire scalp cream, AFRO Sheen, and nut brown liquid foundation) to be regularly stocked in the 3,300 exchanges worldwide, including a set of “never out” items that required an “in-stock efficiency percentage of 95 percent.” The deputy commander of the Korean regional exchange realized what a challenge that would be when the five hundred Afro combs ordered for one store sold out in a matter of minutes. That response, however, the bureaucracy took in stride, pledging to continually monitor consumer demand and update its stock according to consumer preferences.³⁶

In his report to the race relations conference, Colonel Florio defined black consumer needs broadly. Post exchanges, he informed his audience, had begun featuring “soul food” menus once a week. They had expanded their collections of “pre-recorded tapes that depict ‘soul’ (or rhythm and blues music).” They had begun stocking “colorful high fashion clothing” similar to that portrayed in a recent issue of *Ebony* magazine, and were acquiring “a distinctive Afro type shirt more commonly called the dashiki.” And, finally, he assured his audience, 5 percent of the dolls stocked for Christmas season would be black. In response to army concerns about racial conflict, the fourth-largest retail enterprise in the world had committed itself to serving black consumers.³⁷

Meanwhile, AAFES had identified the “urgent requirement” to improve hair cutting and styling services for black customers. In this case its research led to the thirty-year-old hair stylist Willie Lee Morrow. Morrow, as AAFES officials told *Ebony* magazine, had first come to army attention because of his 1966 book, *The Principles of Cutting and Styling Negro Hair*. That may have been true. However, the Marine Corps recently had spent \$140 to bring Morrow and four male models to Camp Pendleton, where his cuts were assessed

³⁵ John D. Florio, “Army-Air Force Exchange Service Programs,” p. 1, slide 1, inclusion 5, *Department of the Army Race Relations Conference*.

³⁶ On black consumer research, see *ibid.*, p. 2, slide 2. For the initial list of African American customer items, see “Pacex Stock Assortment Ethnic Products,” attached to document with Sept. 24, 1970, date stamp, “Equal Opportunity Reporting File 1970” folder, box 1, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472. On the Afro combs order, see Lacy J. Banks, “The Military Meets the Afro,” *Ebony*, 25 (Sept. 1970), 86, 90.

³⁷ Florio, “Army-Air Force Exchange Service Programs,” p. 4, slide 5, inclusion 5, *Department of the Army Race Relations Conference*; Banks, “Military Meets the Afro,” 86.

and then documented by Marine Corps photographers. The story had intrigued an Associated Press reporter, and it got a fair amount of play, including in *Stars and Stripes*.³⁸

Morrow, who hailed from Alabama hill country and ran two successful barber shops in San Diego, was a skilled barber and an excellent self-promoter, and AAFES cast its lot with him. Army lines of authority created a brief hold-up for Morrow's mission: *Stars and Stripes* reported in mid-February 1970 that AAFES was prepared to bring a "top-flight black hair specialist" to Germany to train barbers on cutting black hair but could not do so until U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) decided "which style of Afro haircuts are permitted."³⁹

By mid-March, Morrow was on the road, accompanied by the chief of the AAFES Personal Services Division. An Associated Press article on the program began: "The United States is sending Willie Lee Morrow around the world at government expense to bring bushy, round Afro haircuts to black soldiers." The piece charted his journey: three weeks in Germany and England, where he instructed 750 barbers and three hundred beauticians, with an upcoming forty-day whirlwind tour through Alaska, Hawaii, and Southeast Asia. Lines of authority once again engaged: in Vietnam the article, with the handwritten tag "racial tensions," was circulated with a note demanding: "G-1! What do you know about this?" A G-1 (personnel and administration) officer explained that AAFES headquarters had initiated the trip and had secured "theater clearance" for mid-June. He recommended that U.S. Army Vietnam "neither endorse nor criticize this project." It had, after all, garnered significant support outside Vietnam.⁴⁰

In using command concern about racial conflict to secure high-level support for its expanded role, AAFES had framed the problem around consumer goods. Black soldiers, overall, welcomed the soul music and soul food, as well as the dashikis and Afro picks that now claimed space on the shelves of the post exchange. AAFES efforts on behalf of the Afro were likewise well received, especially as Morrow made clear that he understood what the Afro meant to young black soldiers. As Morrow told a reporter from the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* in Seoul, "the black soldier today wants his blackness recognized—and I'm here to be part of that recognition."⁴¹

But AAFES's solution was only partial. Black pride could not be purchased from the post exchange or contained by its offerings. (Putting "chitterlings and Afro-Sheen in the commissary," said one black officer in 1970, was not sufficient.) Thus, as racial tensions grew and antimilitary sentiment spread within the army, black soldiers wove "soul bracelets" or "slave bands" out of bootlaces. They offered black power salutes, raising clenched fists, and greeted one another with the dap, a complicated and evolving set of moves one soldier in Germany described as "a song of brotherhood, pride and struggle for unity." In an era of emerging cultural nationalism, these cultural symbols carried great importance.⁴²

³⁸ Banks, "Military Meets the Afro," 88; "Afro Cuts Shown to Marines," *Kansas City Times*, Sept. 27, 1969, p. 1. Willie Lee Morrow, *The Principles of Cutting and Styling Negro Hair* (San Diego, 1966).

³⁹ Hazel Guild, "Are the Complaints Justified?," *Stars and Stripes*, Feb. 16, 1970, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Typed collection of Associated Press news snippets, n.d., "Equal Opportunity Reporting File 1970" folder, box 1, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472. Handwritten query and response from Col. R. V. Foster, April 5, 1970, attached to typed collection, *ibid.* The phrase "racial tensions" is written in the margin beside the Willie Lee Morrow story.

⁴¹ Bob Guthrie, "Afro Stylist Gives Pointers at PX," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, June 6, 1970, p. 7.

⁴² Thomas A. Johnson, "I'll Bleed for Myself," Says Black U.S. Soldier in Europe," *New York Times*, Oct. 11, 1970, p. 178; The quotation on the dap is from Sgt. Ted Brooks. See Ted Brooks, "The 'Dap'—It Says 'He's My Brother,'" *Stars and Stripes*, April 21, 1971, p. 10. On dapping and its significance, see Gregory A. Freeman, *Troubled Water: Race, Mutiny, and Bravery on the USS Kitty Hawk* (New York, 2009), 73–74.



In this 1970 photo by Katsuhiro Yokomura, the hair stylist Willie Lee Morrow demonstrates Afro-cutting techniques to barbers and beauticians in Tokyo, as part of an army-sponsored training tour that took him to army posts throughout the world. *From Bob Guthrie, “Afro Stylist Gives Pointers at PX,” Pacific Stars and Stripes, June 6, 1970, p. 7. Courtesy Stars and Stripes.*

They also created a dilemma for the army. Better-targeted consumer goods and increased barbering expertise at the post exchange fit neatly into army organization and practice. The role of the exchange was expanding, and to most observers such visible commitments to serve all soldiers seemed fitting and not at all disruptive. The use of cultural symbols, on the other hand, violated a whole range of army regulations and practices. Signs of individual or group identity—the Afro, the soul bracelet—are, by nature, in conflict with the uniformity central to a uniformed service and to the primacy of military identity. And some such symbols defied the logic of military order, its emphasis on discipline, hierarchy, rank, and regulation. The dap could disrupt the hierarchy of rank with claims of racial brotherhood (Does a sergeant dap with a private? Does a captain?). The clenched fist salute could signal defiance rather than respect. And tolerance for the cultural symbols of some groups and not others violated military principles of consistent policy and equal treatment—and was also likely to cause resentment among those not so favored.

Army leaders were conscious of the potential difficulties from the beginning. The after action report on the initial Department of the Army Race Relations Conference in November 1970 emphasized the “immediate need” for commanders to enforce “standards of appearance, proper wear of the uniform, discipline and military courtesy.” “The lowering of the standards traditional to the United States Army,” it specified, “should not, under any circumstances, be included in a commander’s program for improved race relations.”

More pointedly, an inspector general investigation of a “racial incident” at Camp Baxter, Da Nang, identified command tolerance of such cultural symbols as part of the problem. “Black soldiers at Camp Baxter,” it noted, “were permitted to abuse the use and public display of the outward symbols of ‘black power’ or ‘Black unity.’” The dap was allowed to disrupt normal activity; Afros “trimmed to excessive lengths” were permitted; “unauthorized ‘black power’ symbols were permitted to be worn as part of the uniform.” White soldiers, the report concluded, had come to see black soldiers who employed such symbols “as a threat.”⁴³

Nonetheless, in the face of a growing and intractable problem that seemed particularly significant in the context of the continuing war and geopolitical volatility, the army had become increasingly lenient. As AAFES pushed its Afro-cutting education programs, thus requiring official decisions on hair policy, the army accommodated “neat” Afros, making what was widely characterized as a “major concession” on the “Afro style.” Individual commanders sometimes went further: Major General Vaughan, the white USAREUR deputy chief of staff for logistics who had initially endorsed the Afro, dapped in front of reporters. In a set of broader claims, USAREUR’s commander in chief, Gen. Michael S. Davison, portrayed acceptance of such cultural symbols as a critical step toward racial reconciliation. Speaking in 1971, Davison told army officers that

black power salutes, dapping, Afro haircuts, black bracelets, and similar accoutrements advertise a need to belong where one feels accepted, and, of greater significance, a pride in being black. I do not view these signs and symbols as being anti-establishment. Rather, they point to an establishment defect. Have we truly accepted the black soldier? As our efforts continue, communication channels open; understanding improves; identification of the black soldier should turn toward the Army and its life style, with a reduced need for such symbolism.⁴⁴

General Davison portrayed such symbolism as a temporary step in the full integration of black soldiers into the army, not as an acceptable or desirable long-term path. But an institution that relies on official policies does not easily adapt to short-term approaches or unofficial leniency. By late 1972 the army was officially considering a policy that would allow troops, black and white, to wear “culturally oriented items” while in uniform. That, however, would be an institutional step too far.⁴⁵

Here, again, institutional specifics matter. Because army leaders believed that racial conflict threatened the army’s ability to provide for the national defense, the institution—from individual officers and NCOs through its military secretary and chief of staff—offered black soldiers unprecedented freedom to display the symbols of black pride, most particularly by wearing (modest) Afros. But while the urgent “problem of race” provided

⁴³ “After Action Report: Department of the Army Race Relations Conference,” p. 18, *Department of the Army Race Relations Conference*; “Report of Inquiry into a Racial Incident at Camp Baxter, Da Nang,” May 14, 1971, p. 5, folder 1 of 2, box 8, MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam]—IG [Inspector General] Reports (National Archives). On the use of black power symbols as a threat, see Phillips, *War!*, 222.

⁴⁴ “The Long and Short of Service ‘Hair’ Rules,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 30, 1970, p. 10; Brooks, “The ‘Dap’; Michael S. Davison, opening remarks presented at the Equal Opportunity Conference, Berchtesgaden, Germany, Nov. 10, 1971, p. 18, Speeches folder, box 5, Michael S. Davison Papers (U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center).

⁴⁵ Marc Huet, “Army May OK ‘Cultural Items’ with Uniform,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Nov. 9, 1972, p. 5. See also “Army May Approve Wearing Trinkets,” *Stars and Stripes Europe*, Nov. 4, 1972, p. 9. In the early 1970s, Army Regulation 670-5 prohibited “the wearing of unauthorized items of clothing and or ornamentation with the military uniform.” For information on this set of regulations, see discussion of dissent, n.d., “miscellaneous” folder, box 1, Wallis Papers.

justification for that leniency, such selective leniency contradicted fundamental elements of the army’s institutional logic.

If the army decides, for example, to recognize the importance of black identity and accept the use of various cultural symbols, even to a specific end, it cannot limit the use of cultural symbols to African Americans alone. That is clear in the 1972 discussion about authorizing “culturally oriented items”; it specifies that the policy applies alike to all soldiers, not solely to African Americans. Thus, when the army began to accept symbols of black identity, it opened the door to a variety of claims about identity and expression that went well beyond its original intent and sometimes created a whole new set of racial conflicts.

If one group’s cultural symbols are acceptable, why not those of any other group? Where is the line drawn? If black soldiers can display pride in black identity, can white soldiers display pride in white identity, or perhaps in (white) southern identity?

The U.S. military had tolerated or even embraced informal use of the Confederate battle flag since the flag’s resurgence in the 1950s, and some local efforts to circumscribe its use during the 1960s had drawn heated responses from southern members of Congress. (The biggest flap was over a Marine Corps officer’s order to end display of the Georgia state flag, which—adopted in 1956 in resistance to the civil rights movement—was just a whisper different from the battle flag of the Confederacy.) No matter the history or rationale, however, it was inescapably clear that allowing use of the Confederate flag would not improve race relations among the ranks. Nonetheless, likely due both to assumptions grounded in white privilege and to the expectation that army regulations be universal in scope, white leaders frequently treated all forms of cultural symbolism as equivalent.⁴⁶

Speakers in the concluding session of the 1970 race relations conference noted that white soldiers often perceived “the widespread appearance of black symbols” as threatening, while “the display of the Confederate flag and the use of racial epithets by white soldiers” was “equally offensive to black soldiers.” Their proposed solution was to educate black and white soldiers on the “origins, nature, meaning, and possible misinterpretation of these symbols.” But even the commander at Fort Carson, a man who had circulated a memo through his command, insisting that “nothing exposes the deep prejudices of the white majority more than the view that racial harmony depends on solving ‘the Black problem’ or ‘the Chicano problem’[;] our basic problem to be solved is our ‘WHITE PROBLEM,’” treated the two symbols as equivalent. Fort Carson’s response to a 1971 query on race relations noted that “there are no restrictions on black unity bracelets or the display of confederate flags.”⁴⁷

Once again, however, from the institutional perspective of the army, the point of accommodating cultural symbols was to lessen racial tension. And no matter how many officers equated Afros and Confederate flags, the two were not compatible, and the display

⁴⁶ For an account of a controversy concerning the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in the Vietnam War and protest from Georgia representative W. S. Stuckey, see “Stars and Bars Can Fly in Viet,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 18, 1968, p. 6. Fred S. Hoffman, “Confederate Flag Shall Fly Again,” *Abilene (TX) Reporter-News*, May 17, 1968, p. 2; “It Should Fly Anywhere” *Scott County (MS) Times*, June 19, 1968, p. 2. On army tolerance of such flags, see “Negro, Later Killed, Wrote: Some U.S. Army Units Fly Confederate Flags in Viet,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 17, 1968, p. 39.

⁴⁷ “After Action Report: Department of the Army Race Relations Conference,” p. 16, *Department of the Army Race Relations Conference*; Maj. Gen. John C. Bennett to All Iron Horsemen, “Racial Harmony among Young Americans,” Dec. 6, 1971, memo, p. 1, Racial Harmony Council folder, box 1, Wallis Papers. Commanding General, Fort Carson, to Commanding General, USA5 Fort Sheridan, relations briefing for secretary of the army, Jan. 1971, pp. 6–7, “Race Relations: Briefing” folder, *ibid.*

of Confederate flags undermined the larger goal. The army's solution—at least in Vietnam—was in keeping with army practice: it endorsed uniformity and regulation. Rather than distinguishing between the two groups and their chosen symbols, the army turned to current military regulations that transcended the issue at hand. A pamphlet that Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) began distributing in 1970 offered the usual equivalencies: while the “Dixie’ flag” was “particularly irritating” to black servicemen “because of the slavery aspects of the Civil War, and its more recent use in anti-civil rights demonstrations,” for some whites, the flag was a “deeply cherished” symbol of the “courage and sacrifice of Americans for a cause” and, furthermore, was incorporated into several state flags. Continuing the paragraph, with no comment on the relative legitimacy of those opposing claims, the pamphlet stated MACV policy:

Within MACV the only flags authorized to be flown are those of the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Minuteman award. On special occasions or holidays when the installation commander deems the display of state flags appropriate, they may be displayed in tastefully arranged groupings if all states are represented. If the flag of each state is not available, none are to be displayed.⁴⁸

The same document suggested a vision of social change that fit well with military authority, which extended well beyond that of civilian institutions: while changing attitudes may be impossible, the authors wrote, “we can require a change in actions and hope that a change in attitude will follow.” Thus, a specific policy, constructed without reference to race or meaning, could deal with the problem of the Confederate flag.⁴⁹

In the preceding instances, army leaders had tentatively recognized racial identity and accepted symbols of racial pride in hopes of advancing racial comity or, at least, of calming racial tensions that found expression through violence. They had at least partially circumvented the problem posed by the Confederate flag. But what about other forms of identity—those not based in race—and their associated cultural symbols? If soldiers could wear Afros as symbols of black identity, could soldiers likewise demonstrate that they belonged to “youth”? To the cool or the hip?

By the late 1960s, as countercultural styles merged into America's youth culture, young men had embraced long hair. If, for black men, Afros signaled masculinity and black pride, for many young white men, long hair also laid claim to a meaningful identity. And just as Afros seemed to challenge the primacy of military identity, so too did flowing locks. Not all agreed that the challenge was absolute; when Kester wrote his memo for the office of the secretary of the army in 1969, he had advocated loosening hair policy overall, in keeping with the fashion of the age. Commanders, he wrote, do not seem to understand that their men share the goal of looking “neat and handsome,” but understand those terms differently. “The commander sees a soldier after a haircut,” Kester wrote, “and thinks, ‘There, he certainly looks better.’” But that same soldier “looks at himself in the mirror” and thinks, “I have been disfigured.” Continuing his case for loosened regulation, Kester claimed that longer hair had become so generally accepted that it no longer had any political significance, despite commanders' associations with “filth, hippies, war

⁴⁸ “Small-Unit Leader's Pamphlet,” MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] dir. 600-12, April 17, 1972, p. 6, “MACV Publications” folder, box 5, USARV [United States Army Vietnam] Human Relations, Records of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Administration, RG 0472. This directive was first issued in 1970. The pamphlet for small-unit leaders was adapted from one created by the Marine Corps. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968–1973* (Washington, 2006), 236.

⁴⁹ “Small-Unit Leader's Pamphlet,” 4.

protesters, and draft resisters.” Besides, he noted, with an attempt at humor, “They are not asking to look like the Beatles.”⁵⁰

That was clearly true, as Kester’s memo more or less coincided with the release of the album *Abbey Road*. By 1969 the Beatles were on the leading edge of the freak revolution, a far cry from the innocent-seeming mop tops who had sent teenage girls into a frenzy five years before. But the haircuts of the “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” Beatles also exceeded the tolerance of most NCOs and officers, and therein lay the problem. Hair was frequently a subject of contention across lines of rank. It was a source of cross-service sniping, as soldiers complained about sailors sporting long hair and beards, their pseudo-civilian look first authorized in 1970 by Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt’s celebrated Z-grams. And within the army the legitimacy of a haircut was always open to interpretation. A soldier might pass inspection in the morning, only to be disciplined by a different officer before noon.⁵¹

The army could do nothing about the wayward navy and its controversial admiral, but the internal confusions were just another nail for the army’s hammer. This was an institution that would specify the brand and color of paint (Benjamin Moore bone white) to be used in all recruiting offices, along with the number (three) of toy tanks, helicopters, GI Joe action figures, or other personal items allowed on each recruiter’s desk. Regulation was the lifeblood of the institutional army. Over the course of four years, regulations governing hair expanded from 1967’s vague “present a neat and soldierly appearance” to a thirty-seven-word statement in 1969 to 1971’s eventual solution: 569 words that detailed not only the permissible length or bulk of hair but also the shape of sideburns, extent of mustache, and conditions allowing the wearing of wigs. Throughout the decade, regulations required that posters portraying acceptable hair styles be “prominently displayed” on unit bulletin boards and in barber shops and offices.⁵²

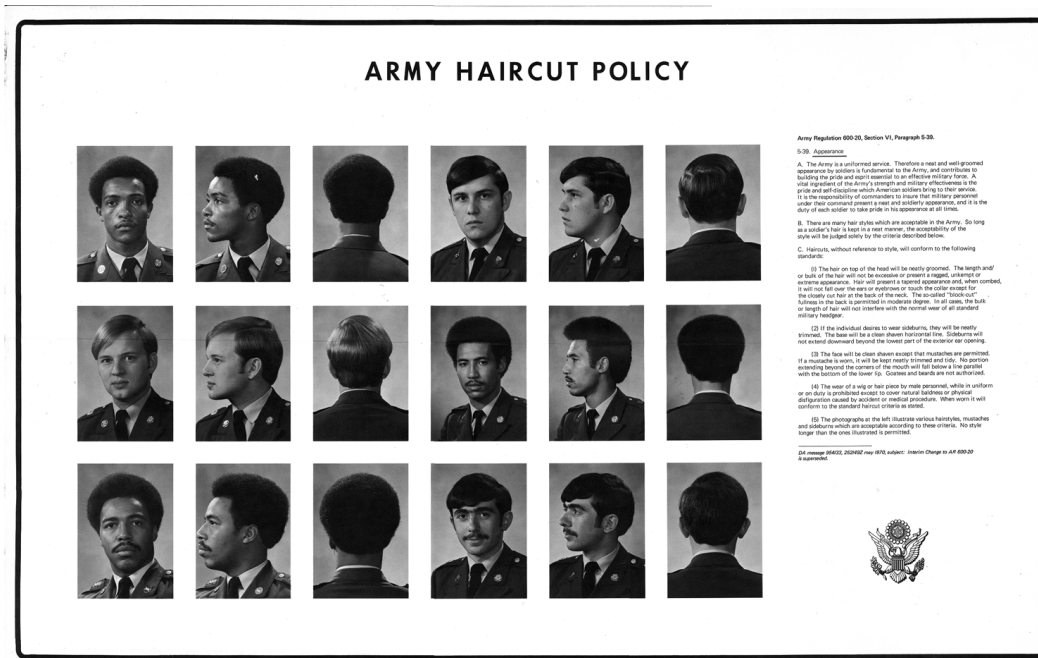
Despite the expanding regulations, army hair policy had become more liberal by the early 1970s. Civilian hairstyles, however, were moving to the extreme. Military notions of “neat and well-groomed” were the antithesis of civilian male 1970s fashion, even if those who adopted such styles believed themselves, in Kester’s phrase, “handsome.” In this era of extremism, despite the army’s best attempts to employ its usual tools and some extraordinary ones, struggles over hair policy continued to roil the institution.

A somewhat humorous example pitted U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) against the institution’s chief of staff. Faced with the end of the draft and anticipating the daunting task, beginning in 1973, of attracting twenty to thirty thousand recruits each month to the new all-volunteer force, a group of army leaders sought creative solutions. One such effort targeted unnecessary “irritants,” otherwise known as “chickenshit.” In this spirit, USAREC acknowledged how much young men, at the beginning of the 1970s, cared about their hair. But the recruiting advertisement that promised “we care more about how you think than how you cut your hair,” along with a photo of a young man

⁵⁰ Kester, Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of the Army: Subject, Haircuts, Sept. 5, 1969, pp. 2, 3, SEA RS 249, 1969.

⁵¹ The Beatles, *Abbey Road* (LP record; Apple SO-383; 1969). For Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt’s discussion of hair and twelve other topics of concern, see “Elimination of Demeaning or Abrasive Regulations,” Z-gram no. 57, Nov. 10, 1970, in *Zumwalt: The Life and Times of Admiral Elmo Russell “Bud” Zumwalt*, by Larry Berman (New York, 2012), 244–50.

⁵² Bailey, *America’s Army*, 242. “Army Command Policy,” Nov. 6, 2014, *U.S. Army*, <https://www.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/399376.pdf>. To see the evolution of Army Command Policy (AR 600-20), use the *Wayback Machine* digital Internet archive to search *NCO Historical Society*, <http://www.ncohistory.com/>.



By 1971, U.S. Army regulations governing haircuts had become extremely detailed. Nonetheless, those in authority often interpreted the specifications differently, and a man who passed inspection in the morning might find himself ordered to get a haircut before noon the same day. This army poster, which pictured front, side, and rear views of acceptable haircuts, was meant to solve the problem. *Courtesy U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.*

with somewhat long-ish hair, pushed General Westmoreland over the edge. The army tried to recall the ad, but it was already in print. So instead an internal memo explained to all concerned that the young man pictured in the ad represented a young civilian who might join the army. "It does NOT—repeat, NOT," continued the memo, "illustrate a soldier meeting the standards set by the Army."⁵³

There was also a series of messy courts-martial cases, complete with extensive media coverage, during the early years of the all-volunteer force. News stories with titles such as "Army's Hair War Jabs Old Wounds" did nothing to help the army's reputation, which remained poor in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. In 1974 Indiana senator Birch Bayh sent his legislative counsel to Germany to investigate the crisis over hair. Wisconsin representative Les Aspin, who would later serve as secretary of defense, called for a congressional investigation that same year. "Apparently the Army is willing to jeopardize our military readiness in Europe over a silly issue like the length of a man's hair," he wrote—in a press release. "That's incredibly stupid even for the Army." The Colorado representative Pat Schroeder committed herself to the cause in 1975, corresponding with Secretary of the Army Howard "Bo" Callaway in a series of exchanges that moved from courteous to frigidly polite.⁵⁴

⁵³ On army efforts to manage the move to the all-volunteer force, see Bailey, *America's Army*, 34–65. On the N. W. Ayer advertising campaign and the 1971 advertisement, see Beth Bailey, "The Army in the Marketplace: Recruiting the All-Volunteer Army," *Journal of American History*, 94 (June 2007), 47–74. On General Westmoreland's response, see Jack Anderson, "Long Hair in Army Ad," *Las Cruces (NM) Sun-News*, Oct. 28, 1971, p. 4.

⁵⁴ "Army's Hair War Jabs Old Wounds," *Bloomington (IL) Pantagraph*, Dec. 22, 1974, p. 1; "Aspin Asks for Congressional Investigation into 'Petty Harassment' of GIs in Europe," press release, Dec. 9, 1974, "USAREUR [United States Army Europe]—Drugs, Hair" folder box 1, David Cortright Papers, dg101 (Swarthmore College Peace Col-

But none of these confrontations was overtly about race, and almost all the soldiers involved were white. By the mid-1970s, as the strength and visibility of the black power movement had receded in civilian society, claims of cultural nationalism no longer held much sway among young black enlisted men. Many still valued a well-cut Afro, but hair no longer carried great symbolic weight. Complaints about hair now came primarily from young white soldiers who were concerned about their ability to “pass”—as civilians. Some lamented that short haircuts made meeting girls difficult. Short hair marked them as military, claimed others, making them the targets of civilian antagonism off post. “The young soldier,” insisted a second lieutenant in 1975, “feels as if he is being viewed as a modern day member of the Hitler youth.” The most extreme claim, in a petition to Congress, was that “the only reason the brass attempts to maintain this situation is to separate us from our civilian brothers and sisters in order to, some day, make easier massacres such as Jackson State and Kent State.” Such concerns betrayed problems at the heart of the new Modern Volunteer Army, as recruits discovered the gulf between army promises and their own experiences and faced lingering public hostility in the wake of the Vietnam War. But they also show how fundamentally struggles over hair policy had changed.⁵⁵

The army had initially focused on hair because young servicemen suggested that hair policy exacerbated the racial conflict that, army leaders believed, threatened military readiness and efficacy. The army had offered greater leniency as African American soldiers demanded recognition of black identity and symbols of black pride. But the fundamental logic of the institution was at odds with such actions. Yes, cultural symbols might be accommodated in a moment of crisis, the matter of hair treated with unusual forbearance as one piece of a broad, army-wide effort to contain the racial violence that many believed undermined army efficacy in an era of frightening geopolitical instability. But by the mid-1970s, racial conflict no longer seemed so likely to overflow into violence. (“Confrontation Era Over,” a *Stars and Stripes* headline proclaimed in 1974, quoting the First Armored Division’s race relations officer.) And army leaders did not see the haircut woes of young white soldiers as a major threat to army efficacy or to the stability of the free world—no matter what Representative Aspin said.⁵⁶

Thus, with the question of hair separated from the problem of race, the army evaluated lessons learned. As an institution, it had never been comfortable with its limited embrace of cultural symbolism, including hairstyles; it had experimented only because it was desperate for solutions to endemic racial conflict in the ranks, and ground-level acceptance of such efforts was always spotty and contested. Now the army reasserted claims of tradition. As an official letter on hair policy developed in 1975 explained, the army is “not merely an extension” of American society, “but rather a separate and unique institution. Consequently,” it continued, “the Army must retain basic standards of appearance and dress.”⁵⁷

lection, Swarthmore, Pa.); Letters series between Secretary of the Army Howard “Bo” Callaway and Rep. Patricia Schroeder, Jan.–April 1975, “Haircut” folder, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 294. For the second lieutenant’s assertions, see Correspondence between Secretary of the Army Howard “Bo” Callaway and Rep. Patricia Schroeder, May 9, 1975, p. 2, “Haircut” folder, box 1, Cortright Papers. On the facilitation of massacres, see Matthew Carroll petition, May 1, 1974, “USAREUR [United States Army Europe]—Drugs, Hair” folder, *ibid.* On the modern volunteer army, see Bailey, *America’s Army*, 87.

⁵⁶ Dan Synovec, “Confrontation Era Over, Expert Says,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 25, 1974, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Gen. Fred C. Weyland to Maj. John T. Rollinson, Nov. 11, 1974, HRC 727: Hair Styles and Beards. The quotation is from a sample response to complaints about army hair policy, as requested by deputy assistant secretary of defense John G. Finneran in January 1975. (For its official response, the army provided a letter written by the army chief of staff in response to a query from Maj. John T. Rollinson in late 1974.) Finneran, in turn, was responding

The challenge to army hair policy was ultimately put to rest in mid-1976 by the U.S. Court of Military Appeals (CMA), following a Supreme Court decision upholding the right of civilian police departments to regulate the hairstyles of their members. In this trial, army lawyers argued that there “is a pride and spirit in being a recognizable force, and a force whose appearance requires uniformity,” and stressed the importance of discipline within that institution. When the CMA upheld the army’s right to regulate the hairstyles of its members, it endorsed army claims about the importance of traditional institutional values of uniformity, order, and discipline. In the end, both internal army policy and the military court validated notions of military exceptionalism and rejected the right of soldiers to express alternate identities through their hairstyles. Both concluded that the U.S. Army was a uniformed service, separate from civilian society, and based in principles of order and discipline. Self-expression through hair too directly violated the institutional logic, practices, and culture of the army. At stake was the right of a military service to enforce its regulations—something the army claimed was absolutely fundamental to the institution, regardless of the subject of those regulations.⁵⁸

In the realm of race, however, the army’s brief experiment with Afros and the cultural symbolism of black pride would have long-lasting significance, helping shape the ways this massive institution dealt with demands for social change. In an age of cultural nationalism, black soldiers had demanded the right to express black pride; they had embraced the Afro as a symbol of black identity in an overwhelmingly white institution. As the army confronted their demands in the context of impending crisis, it tested its own institutional limits. It learned (or verified) that the institution possessed a surprising flexibility. In the face of crisis, the army could respond creatively; it could bend—at least when under threat of internal violence and external failure.

The institution also drew lessons about the tools available for managing social change: in the military, hierarchy is clear, authority reaches well past the boundaries of civilian employers, and orders are orders, with mechanisms for enforcement. That mattered, for (as the comments on Confederate flags by MACV officers noted) forcing changes in behavior may prompt changes in attitudes. Nonetheless, as General Vaughn’s instructions to avoid racial epithets when addressing black soldiers reveals, a great distance often exists between policies and their ground-level implementations.

Finally, in this process, the army confronted its institutional limits, the ways the weight of organization, culture, history, tradition, logic, policy, and practice fundamentally define what will more likely succeed and what will more likely fail. Ultimately, the institution returned to fundamentals: military identity must take precedence over all others; uniformity, order, discipline, and regulation must be paramount.

In the end, however, an additional lesson can be drawn. It was the framework of cultural nationalism that fundamentally shaped and solidified the army’s institutional position that race matters; it was black soldiers’ emphasis on black identity that fostered army

to a congressional request for “the rationale of each Military Service concerning the length of haircuts.” John G. Finneran, Memorandum for Assistant Secretaries of the Military Departments (Manpower and Reserve Affairs): Subject, Haircut Policies, Jan. 16, 1975, HRC 727: Hair Styles and Beards.

⁵⁸ “CMA Upholds Hair Regs,” *Army Times*, July 19, 1976, clipping, “Haircut” folder, box 1, Cortright Papers; Andy Plattner, “Hair Style Regs Could Get Clipped,” *Army Times*, [1976] clipping, *ibid.*; “Top Court OKs Haircut Policy,” *Army Times*, [1976], clipping, *ibid.* See also Gael Graham, “Flaunting the Freak Flag: *Karr v. Schmidt* and the Great Hair Debate in American High Schools, 1965–1975,” *Journal of American History*, 91 (Sept. 2004), 522–43.

leaders’ race-conscious approach. By the mid-1970s the army—true to its own institutional identity—had concluded that it would not address race in the realm of culture. Instead, it would take the key lesson learned—race-consciousness—and seek solutions to the evolving “problem of race” more in accord with its core institutional values. It would no longer engage on the battleground of cultural symbolism and identity but instead through race-conscious approaches to rank, to leadership, and to military occupation and assignment—categories that corresponded more closely to the institutional logic and practices of the U.S. Army.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The claim about continuing approaches is based on research for my current book project, “The U.S. Army and ‘the Problem of Race,’ 1965–1985.” For published discussion of race-conscious (or “race-savvy”) approaches within the army and the period following the 1973 move to an all-volunteer force, see Moskos and Butler, *All That We Can Be*; and Bailey, *America’s Army*, 88–129.