

# WOMEN AND MINORITIES IN AMERICA'S VOLUNTEER MILITARY

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*Since the inception of the all-volunteer force (A VF) in 1973, the U. S. military has been considered a pioneer of equal opportunity among the nation's institutions, despite its being a unique internal labor market characterized by a hierarchical structure with little lateral entry. The authors argue that this actually helped women and minorities because (1) the advancement process is both well defined and based on merit, and (2) the promotion process looks at everyone. The pay raises that accompanied the A VF made military service competitive with civilian labor market alternatives and provided women and minorities with a viable career choice. They took advantage of this freedom of choice resulting in their ever-increasing representation at all levels of the armed forces. (JEL 145, 171, 178, 1490, HOO, H11)*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Economists contributed significantly to the debate about the efficacy of an all volunteer force (AVF) as Oi (1967a, 1967b), Hansen and Weisbrod (1967), and Altman and Fechter (1967) pioneered the theoretical and empirical work. Thirty-five years later, Warner and Asch (2001) provide a review of the literature and the issues surrounding that debate and discuss the record of and prospects for America's volunteer military. But little attention has been paid to changes in the representation of women and minorities in the military during the A VF era.

Since the onset of the volunteer military almost 30 years ago (1973), the American workforce has become more diverse, and the active-duty military reflects that diversity. Consider the following comparisons of full-time military-age (18-44 years) civilian workers and active-duty military personnel in 1970 and 2000. Over that 30-year period, the percentage of civilians who were white fell

from 89% to 70%, and the proportion of blacks rose from 10% to 12% and other racial categories from 1% to 18%. The percentage of women in the civilian workforce rose from 29% to 41 %. Percentage changes in the active-duty *military* population between 1970 and 2000 were comparable: from 83% to 65% white, from 11 % to 20% black, and from 6% to 14% Hispanic and other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Women as a proportion of all military personnel increased from 2% to 15%.

Although strides have been made by many organizations in the civilian sector, the equal opportunity record for the armed services is one that stands out. The military is the only large organization in which large units (comprised mostly of men) are led by women, and large units (comprised largely of whites) are led by minorities. It is a testimony to how well integration and equal opportunity work in the armed forces. Although few would maintain that the military's work is done in this area, progress has been steady over the years due in large part to its constant monitoring of programs, scrutiny of trends in population representation, internal surveys and studies of its personnel, and aggressive approach to management training. These

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### ABBREVIATIONS

AFQT: Armed Forces Qualification Test  
AVF: All-Volunteer Force  
ROTC: Reserve Officer Training Corps

have led Dorn (1991, 1992), Eitelberg (1993), and Moskos (1994) to argue that the military remains ahead of the private sector in promoting racial and ethnic integration and the employment of women in nontraditional jobs.

## II. THE GATES COMMISSION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE AVF

In the years leading up to the inception of the AVF in 1973, the military force was predominantly male and white. Although the Gates Commission (1970) had relatively little to say about women in the military (they made up less than 2% of the armed forces), it did address a concern raised in some quarters about a volunteer military becoming "too black."

Those who held this view argued that the higher pay required for a volunteer force would be particularly appealing to blacks that have poor civilian opportunities relative to their white counterparts. Black service members already had higher overall reenlistment rates, and some believed that a volunteer force would lead to a disproportionate number of blacks entering military service. White enlistment and reenlistment rates would decline, further leading to a black-dominated enlisted force. Racial tensions would grow; whites would become disenchanted with military service, and blacks would resent sharing a disproportionate burden of defense. Also, the military would be seen as "creaming" qualified black youth for service in the military-taking them away from jobs in the civilian community where their talents were needed (Gates Commission, 1970, p. 142).

The commission recognized these arguments, but predicted that the force would not become predominantly black with the end of conscription. Regardless of what proportion of blacks would ultimately make up the AVF, the commission believed that policy makers should not lose sight of the real issue. If higher pay makes opportunities in the military more attractive than those in the civilian sector for a particular segment of society, the Gates Commission argued that the appropriate response is to correct inequities in the civilian sector.

The argument that blacks would bear a disproportionate burden of an all-volunteer military mixes up "service by free choice"

with "compulsory service." Note that all first-term members had to serve at wages below what they would earn in the civilian sector. Those blacks that enlist in a volunteer military decide for themselves that military service is preferable to other alternatives. They regard military service as a rewarding opportunity-not a burden-and have revealed their preference for it. To deny "them this opportunity would reflect either bias, or a paternalistic belief that blacks are not capable of making the 'right' decisions concerning their lives" (Gates Commission, 1970, p. 16).

Besides paying little reference to women in the report, the Gates Commission paid no attention to minority groups other than blacks because their numbers were very small at the time. The country was well into a functioning volunteer force before the categories of Hispanic, Asian, and other ethnic groups became common metrics for counting populations by the Bureau of the Census.

The pay raise that accompanied the inception of the AVF was critical to its success because it made military service competitive with civilian labor market alternatives. It was a necessary but not sufficient condition for success, however. What was also important was that the military services take recruiting more seriously. Because they now had to recruit all their members, the services could no longer rely on the walk-in trade and had to provide adequate resources for advertising, enlistment incentives, and market research to expand the pool of potential recruits. This, together with a nondiscriminatory assignment system based on merit and standards, enabled the military to attract more women and racial and ethnic minorities-particularly those with higher aptitude, as the armed forces became more selective.

## III. THEN AND NOW: WHAT HAS HAPPENED OVER TIME?

Moving from conscription to a volunteer force *explicitly* involved only first-term enlisted personnel, as they were the only ones drafted. Because many people believed they would be drafted, however, and wanted to select their service, there were also many draft-induced volunteers. Thus the first-term enlisted force of this time was a blend of draftees, draft-induced enlistees, and true

**TABLE 1**  
Active-Duty Officer and Enlisted Forces by Race and Ethnicity, 1972 and 2000

Race/Ethnicity	Enlisted		Officer	
	1972	2000	1972	2000
Total number	1,975,649	1,153,575	335,651	217,103
Percent				
White	81.2	61.8	95.5	81.2
Black	12.6	22.4	2.3	8.6
Hispanic	4.0	9.0	1.2	4.0
Other	1.9	6.0	0.4	4.3
Unknown	0.2	0.6	0.5	1.9

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

volunteers, whereas the enlisted career force was composed only of all those who voluntarily reenlisted. The elimination of the draft also affected officers, many of whom were college graduates and also induced to volunteer. The authors will concentrate on the enlisted force because of its relative size but will also examine the officer corps because it provided other opportunities for the advancement of minorities and women in the military.

At the end of the U.S. draft in June 1972, the proportion of black men in the enlisted force had risen to 12.6% and that of black officers to 2.3% (Table 1). The commission estimated that by 1980 the male enlisted force would be 14.9% black; the actual percentage in 1980 was 22.0%.<sup>1</sup> But the commission argued that, even if its estimates were low, there should never be a policy to cut back on enlisting blacks or to set quotas.

The gain in black representation from 1972 to 1980 was substantial, but by 1980 black representation stabilized at 22% to 23%. Other minorities have also made sizable gains in the enlisted force since the inception of the AVF. Hispanics have more than doubled, and other minorities (including Asians and Native Americans) have more

1. The Gates Commission focused their predictions exclusively on men; the actual numbers we report in Table 1 are for men and women. The commission made further predictions for the 1980 male enlisted force for each of the services. These predictions for 1980, as well as the actual percentages of male black enlisted, were:

- Army: 18.8% predicted and 32.9% actual
- Navy: 8.2% predicted and 11.5% actual
- Marine Corps: 16.0% predicted and 22.4% actual
- Air Force: 14.8% predicted and 16.3% actual.

than tripled their representation. In the officer corps, minority representation more than tripled, although the percentages are smaller than those in the enlisted force (Table 1).

*A. Black Casualties in the Volunteer Force*

Critics of a large black representation in the military also asserted that African Americans would bear a disproportionate burden of casualties in time of war. In the Vietnam War, however, Binkin and Eitelberg (1982, p. 76) and Moskos and Butler (1996, p. 8) report that black fatalities were between 12% and 13% of all Americans killed—a figure proportionate to the size of their civilian population and actually lower than their percentage of the army at that time.

Turning to the A VF era, analysis of combat deaths in the six military operations since Vietnam shows that blacks accounted for 15% of combat fatalities. Although this figure is somewhat larger than the relevant black civilian population (about 13%), Moskos and Butler (1996) argue that it is considerably below the percentage of blacks in the active duty army (about 19%).

Today, the increasing attraction of blacks and other enlisted minorities to non-combat-arms occupations suggests that the issue of black combat deaths that engaged certain commentators at the onset of the A VF will become even less of an issue in the future.

*B. Representation*

There is concern among some that the military is not as representative of society as it should be in terms of socioeconomic and other characteristics. Though there is reason to expect that the armed forces should not be significantly different from the population it defends, the issue of representativeness is basically a red herring. There are many reasons why the military should not be expected to be representative. The law forbids the military from accessing individuals with low aptitude, for example, and for obvious reasons the military does not recruit disabled young people. Furthermore, women are underrepresented relative to their numbers in the civilian population and are prohibited by law from participation in ground combat occupations. Today's military is younger than the

population as a whole and is more physically fit. It is also smarter than the population as measured by the nationally normed Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). In fiscal year 2000, 67% of new enlistees scored in the upper half (50th percentile) of the AFQT; by definition, only 50% of the general population scored in the upper half. New enlistees are also more educated than their civilian peers because over 90% of new recruits have high-school diplomas; only 75% of American youth ages 18 to 23 have diplomas.

The officer corps draws from the population of college graduates where minorities are not as well represented as in the overall population. However, the services have had success recruiting blacks in a greater proportion than in the college-educated population. For example, blacks account for about 7.5% of young college graduates but make up about 8.5% of officer accessions (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, 1999, p. 23).

Most of those who fault the A VF on representative grounds tend to support a return to the draft or a system of national service. A conscripted force might be a more representative force in some sense, but the price would be high. There would be fewer African Americans. It would be a less educated and less competent force because conscription included about 30% of those who are not accepted under today's stricter standards.<sup>2</sup> Morale and commitment would deteriorate, and overall military readiness would probably suffer.

As former Congressman Les Aspin remarked (Aspin, 1991, p. 3):

Today, we have a race-neutral voluntary system that produces a superb military while offering individuals advancement on the basis of merit. If that makes the military more attractive to minority members than job prospects in the society at large, then it is the society at large that is broken. Let's fix that. Resuming a draft in order to achieve a military that better meets an abstract notion of representativeness would be a grave mistake.

2. Current accession standards set by the Department of Defense require that 90% of enlisted accessions be high-school diploma graduates and that 60% of accessions test in the top half of the AFQT. These are higher standards than those under conscription.

### *C. Some Background on Women in the Military*

The navy was the first service to use women in any numbers, recruiting women early in World War I. The use of women in the military required no legal action; it was such a novel concept that no one had thought to ban it. Almost all of the roughly 13,000 women who served in WW I were clerical workers and nurses. Women appeared eager to join and earned the same pay as their male counterparts.

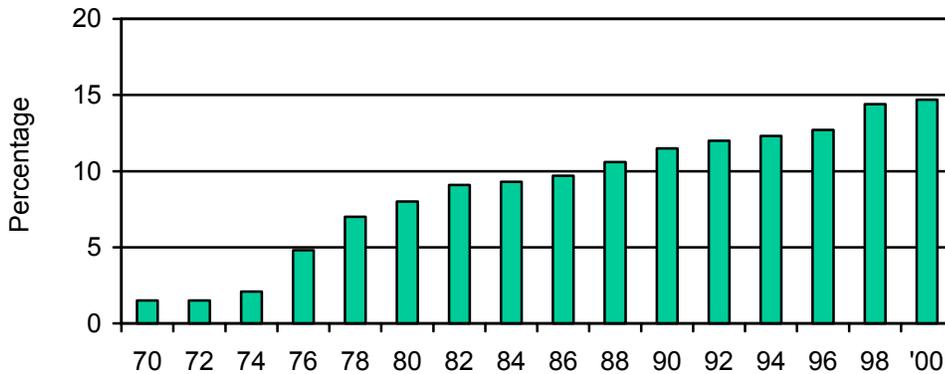
Before WW I (because of tradition) and between world wars (because of law), women other than nurses were excluded from military service. In both major wars, women primarily served in auxiliary roles, mainly as nurses or in clerical/administrative positions to fill shore positions so that servicemen could go to the front. Notable exceptions included women aviators serving as instructors and as pilots ferrying new aircraft to Britain. At the end of WW II, there were 12 million men and 280,000 women in uniform (Holm, 1992, p. 100). Most went home after the war.

Public law did not ban women from military service after WW II as it did after WW I, but federal legislation passed in 1948 limited women's terms of enlistment, ranks, and benefits and explicitly excluded them from service in combat positions in the navy and air force.<sup>3</sup> Relaxation of rank restrictions and the removal of the female end strength cap occurred in 1967. But the percentage of women in the military still remained below 2% until the onset of the volunteer force. However, that percentage has risen steadily to where women now account for 15% of the enlisted force (Figure 1) and 19% of 2000's enlisted accessions.

Operation Just Cause (Panama) and, more important, Operation Desert Shield/Desert

3. Public Law 625 forbade navy and air force women from combat aviation and navy women from ships other than hospital ships and naval transports. Restrictions on women in ground combat occupations were not codified into law but were understood to be binding. The law also put a ceiling of 2% on female regular military strength, forbade women with dependent children from service, and allocated only one female 0-6 (navy captain or colonel in the other services) position in each service. In 1967, Public Law 90-30 opened the 0-6 rank to women, but there were still restrictions for general or flag officers. For a reason no one has explained very well, the act did not ban women from combat positions in the army (Holm, 1992, pp. 119-20).

**FIGURE 1**  
 Women as Percent of the Enlisted Force, 1970-2000



Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

Storm (Persian Gulf), where women represented about 7% of the total U.S. deployed force, opened a new era for military women. Although the proportion of women in the U.S. military is the highest of any country in the world, only about 14% of military personnel are women.<sup>4</sup>

IV. INTERNAL LABOR MARKETS

The military is a somewhat peculiar or unique labor market. First, it is defined by its youthfulness. Less than 10% of the military are over 39 years of age and only 3% are over age 44. For the enlisted force, less than 7% are older than age 39. Second, for both the enlisted and officer corps, there are distinct entry points, defined quite strictly by education and somewhat less strictly by age. There is virtually no lateral entry, except for some specialties, such as doctors, dentists, lawyers, chaplains, and musicians. Enlisted personnel are usually high-school graduates, entering around 18 years of age. Officers are college graduates, entering at about age 22. The senior officer and the senior enlisted in each service will be selected from those who entered some 20 years earlier. There are no

4. For a discussion of the changing role of women in the navy see Fletcher et al. (1994).

corporate raids across the services or with the civilian sector; leaders are drawn exclusively from within.

The military relies on a hierarchical, pyramidal structure, with formal promotion processes and an "up or out" system. Those who fail to receive promotions are discharged. Even in wartime when requirements for personnel have been greatly expanded, the requirement that one begin as a private or a second lieutenant has been widely upheld. Rather than directly appoint civilians to senior enlisted or officer grades, the normal process has been to accelerate promotions to fill mid-level and senior ranks.

*A. Progress of Women and Minorities: Reaching the Top Ranks*

A labor market with little lateral entry does not (on the surface at least) appear to be one that would provide increasing opportunities for women and minorities. This feature of military labor markets may, in fact, have helped the integration and advancement of women and minorities in the services. There are two main reasons. First, in an internal labor market where everyone starts at the bottom, those who stay will have been through the same vetting process. In the military, this process of promotion is both well

defined and widely believed to be one that advances the most qualified to the higher ranks. Here, women and minorities gain credibility as they go through the process. Second, and perhaps more important, is the fact that the promotion process looks at "everyone." No one enters the military in a job track without advancement opportunities although promotions become more competitive as one advances, and not everyone will be promoted. Thus, we would argue that, even though women and minorities had to start at the bottom and wait over 20 years to reach the top ranks, once they reached the top, they were competitive with their male peers. They had been screened, vetted, and promoted by the same process.

It takes a long time to reach the top ranks. Average years of service for O-7 (rear admiral in the navy and brigadier general in the other services) is 28 years. Thus to figure out how well the military has integrated women and minorities into its top leadership positions, we need to look back to accessions some 28 years ago. What proportion of those accessions were women and minorities? What proportion of leadership positions do they now account for? In all cases, they make up a larger proportion of the senior positions than they did of accessions.

For the top officer positions, O-7 rank (rear admirals or brigadier generals):

- Blacks were 3.1 % of officer accessions in the years that today's O-7s entered the military and are now 6.7% of O-7s.
- Women were 8.6% of officer accessions in the years that today's O-7s entered and are now 8.6% of O-7s.
- Hispanics were 0.2% of officer accessions in the years that today's O-7s entered and are now 2.0% of O-7s.

The military's internal labor markets have worked exceedingly well to provide top leadership positions for minority and women officers.

Among the enlisted force, the proportion of accessions that make it to the top rank, E-9, is constrained by law to be no more than 1 % of the force. Thus achieving the E-9 rank is an extremely competitive process. For these top enlisted positions:

- Blacks were 18.9% of enlisted accessions in the years that the current E-9s entered the military and are now 28.1 % of E-9s.

- Women were 8.3% of enlisted accessions in the years that the current E-9s entered and are now 13.4% of E-9s.

- Hispanics were 5.5% of enlisted accessions in the years that the current E-9s entered and are now 5.9% of E-9s.

### *B. Quality of the Enlisted Force*

The impressive record of advancement among blacks, Hispanics, and women shown above occurred partly because high-aptitude minorities and women freely chose the military as an alternative to a civilian job. Those who chose to stay saw the military as a viable career option.

High-quality enlisted personnel—those with both a high-school diploma and who score in the top half of the AFQT—are sought after by the military, first, because they are most likely to complete their enlistment tour. Army data show that about 80% of high-school graduates will complete their initial three-year obligation, compared with only half of nongraduates. Results are similar in the other services. Second, high-quality personnel have significantly fewer disciplinary problems than their lower-quality counterparts. Third, high-aptitude personnel are easier to train and perform better on the job than their lower-quality peers. There is a body of empirical literature that supports the positive relationship between aptitude and performance (see Gilroy and Sellman [1995, pp. 53-54] and Cooke and Quester [1992]).

## V. SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE SERVICES

Because each service individually recruits, promotes, and retains its personnel, it is appropriate to examine the experiences of women and minorities by service. Because of space limitations, the authors limit their examples to the army and marine corps. They begin with the marine corps, examining gender as well as race and ethnic differences in both early separation behavior and long-term retention. Then they turn to the army to examine the overall progress of blacks.

### *A. Early Separations vs. Long-Term Retention of Male and Female Marines*

Each year 5% to 6% of marine corps accessions are women. The three-month basic

training or boot camp is tough and generally understood to be the most physically stressful of all the services. Partly because women tend to be less prepared for this arduous training, or because women are less committed to sticking it out to become marines, female boot camp attrition is substantially higher than that for men. Such a high initial quit rate for women is not surprising because the marine corps is a very nontraditional job choice for them.

Despite the fact that female marine corps accessions have substantially higher boot camp attrition than their male counterparts, the long-term retention of female marines has usually been as high as (and sometimes higher than) that of males. For this to be so, the post-boot camp attrition for female marines must be substantially lower than that of males.

The authors examined male and female accessions in fiscal years 1979 through 1994, and followed them through the first reenlistment point, through 6 years (or 73 months) of service. Even though boot camp attrition averaged 18.3% for women (13.3% for men), by 73 months of service the overall loss rates were roughly the same.

What does it mean that, after boot camp, female marines stay in the corps at even greater rates than males? Because retention is an overall benchmark of employee satisfaction, women appear to be very satisfied with their career opportunities and chances to excel in the marine corps. In other words, female marines who complete boot camp and successfully adapt to the marine corps a decidedly nontraditional job for females have extremely high retention rates.

Examining boot camp attrition data by race and ethnic background, the authors find only small differences in attrition across these groups, with Hispanics having the lowest boot camp attrition rate and whites the highest. Overall separation rates at 73 months of service are 84% for whites, 82% for those of other racial/ethnic backgrounds, 81% for Hispanics, and 78% for blacks.

Focusing on retention rather than separation, the authors find that for those female marines who accessed in fiscal years 1979 through 1983, long-term retention rates were substantially larger than those of male marines. In fact, female retention rates exceeded those of males in every racial/ethnic

group. The 33% 73-month retention rate for black female marines is particularly striking.

Minorities and women have retention rates that exceed those of white men partly because of relative compensation differences between the military and civilian sectors. Because virtually all compensation in the military is based on rank and years of service, gender, race, or ethnicity differences in compensation are minimal. This contrasts with the civilian sector.

In 1979, the ratio of female to male earnings for full-time civilian workers aged 20 to 24 was just over 75%. By 1983, the ratio was slightly over 85%. Although the relative increase in young (20-24 years) women's full-time usual weekly earnings was extremely large during this period, civilian women's wages still lagged behind men's earnings. Marines who entered the corps in the 1979-1983 period and who stayed at least six years were in the service from 1979 through 1989. It was not until 1988 that civilian women's wages reached 90% of those for men. Thus particularly in this earlier period, the greater civilian wage differentials are certainly consistent with higher retention for women than for men.

For accessions in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, the data show a fairly similar pattern but higher long-term retention rates for men. Within the racial/ethnic categories, however, only white female marines have lower retention rates than their male counterparts. Women who are black, Hispanic, or those of other racial/ethnic categories still have higher long-term retention rates than their male counterparts. In these time periods, wages for 20- to 24-year-old women averaged about 95% of male wages, with white women enjoying the largest wage advantages. Again, these female/male marine corps retention patterns are consistent with the relative wage opportunities in the military and the civilian work world. In short, among black, Hispanic, and other minority women, the marine corps offers a greater earnings differential relative to the civilian sector than it does for white women.

Examining the pattern in male long-term retention, white males were found to have consistently lower long-term retention rates, and black males have consistently had the highest. This is again consistent with relative wages in the civilian sector.

### B. The Advantages of an Early Start: The Progress of Blacks in the Army

The army stands out as the military service with the earliest start on black representation, as integration of the forces began in 1948 with the signing of a presidential executive order and finally achieved in 1954—a decade ahead of the omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1964. Blacks accounted for 11.1 % of enlisted and 1.9% of officers in 1949. By 2000, 29% of army enlisted personnel were black as were 12% of all officers and almost 9% of the senior-level officers (generals or admirals) (Table 2). The army has the largest number and proportion of blacks at all grades (not shown), especially at the senior enlisted as well as officer levels. Blacks account for over one-third of all personnel in the highest enlisted grades (E-8 and E-9) and one-third at the mid-grade levels. The 127,000 blacks in the army today account for 45% of all blacks in the active-duty military (277,500).

Data in Table 3 show growth in the proportions of blacks in all services since the beginning of the AVE. Among enlisted men in the army, 26% are black, up from 17% in 1973. Among male officers, the proportion rose from 4% in 1973 to 10.4% in 2000. Black women also have made great strides; their proportion of all women in both the enlisted ranks and the officer corps rose considerably in all services. But the army stands out again with the largest proportions. Today blacks make up about half of all army enlisted women; they are now a plurality, as whites account for 38% of all women in the enlisted force.

Figure 2 shows the changing composition of blacks in the armed forces. The number of black soldiers in the army increased

**TABLE 2**  
Blacks as a Percentage of Active-Duty Officer and Enlisted Forces by Service, 2000

	General or		
	Enlisted	Officers	Admiral
All services	22.4	8.6	6.1
Army	29.1	12.1	8.9
Navy	18.9	6.9	4.2
Air force	18.4	6.4	4.7
Marine corps	16.2	7.5	4.9

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

**TABLE 3**

Percent of Black Officer and Enlisted Active-Duty Forces by Gender and Service, 1973 and 2000

Gender/Service	Enlisted		Officer	
	1973	2000	1973	2000
<b>Men</b>				
Army	17.0	25.9	4.0	10.4
Navy	6.4	18.9	0.9	6.2
Air force	12.6	16.2	1.6	5.2
Marine corps	13.7	15.7	1.4	7.1
<b>Women</b>				
Army	19.4	46.4	3.8	22.2
Navy	6.6	31.5	0.2	6.2
Air force	14.3	27.5	4.1	12.2
Marine corps	16.9	23.2	2.3	11.0

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

markedly at the beginning of the AVF and then began to decline, largely because of an increase in entrance standards and the army's decision not to renew enlistment contracts of low-scoring members who entered during the period when the enlistment test was misnormed.<sup>5</sup> The proportion of blacks in the army has remained stable since 1993 at about 30%.

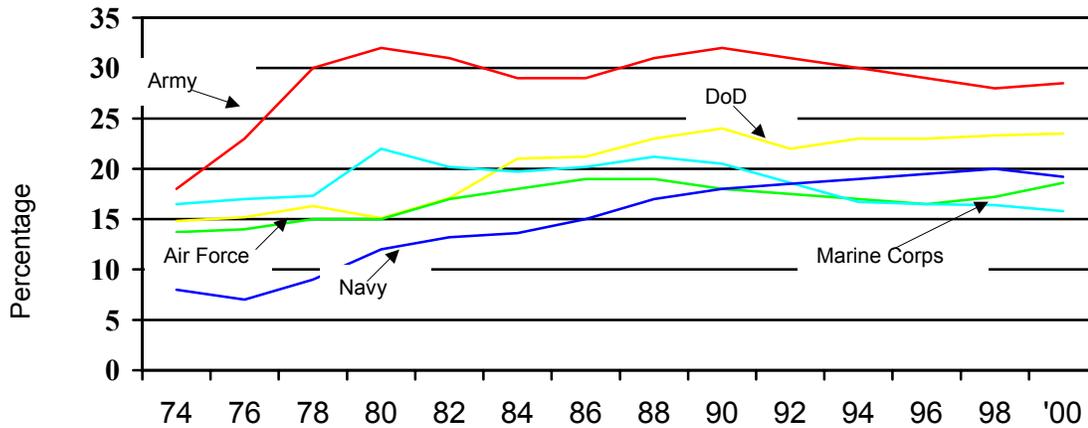
Black representation in army occupations, however, has changed over time. As Tom Ricks, the Pentagon reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, observed:

So much for the old stereotype about the Army's front-line units being cannon fodder laden with minorities. Twenty-five years ago, as the volunteer military took shape, it was a common concern that America would field an "Army of the poor" in which blacks would suffer most in wartime. Even as late as the Gulf War in 1991, Jesse Jackson protested to a largely black audience that "when that war breaks out, our youth will burn first." His concern arose from the fact that 30% of the Army is black, compared with about 11 % of the American population.

Ricks's data are for 1995, when he reports that only 9% of the army infantry were black. He noted that black soldiers were found disproportionately in administrative and support jobs, arguing that those jobs were more likely

5. Enlistment standards were inadvertently lowered between January 1976 and October 1980 by the introduction of miscalibrated forms to the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Over this period, about 25% of accessions would not have qualified for enlistment if the reported scores had accurately reflected aptitudes.

**FIGURE 2**  
Blacks as Percent of the Active-Duty Enlisted Force, by Service



Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

to be compatible with the army career intentions of black soldiers. Ricks argued that it is the young white enlisted males who do not anticipate military careers that are drawn most forcefully to ground combat occupations. That is, after all, what a volunteer military means—volunteers making choices.

Thus black enlistees are more likely to be found in "support" occupations in the army—supply, clerical, transportation, and food service—and less likely to be in combat units. They are also less likely to be in technical occupations.

But regardless of their job assignment, black soldiers are less likely to leave early (attrite) than their white counterparts. In fact, blacks are more than one and a half times more likely than whites to complete their initial army enlistment obligation. The 12-month attrition rate among white men in fiscal year 1999 was 14.6%, compared with only a 10.3% rate for black men; 26.7% of white women left the army during their first 12 months, whereas the rate for black women was about half that—only 14.6%. Blacks also reenlist at higher rates than whites.

The attractiveness of military service to blacks is "simply that for them the grass is not greener in civilian life" (Moskos and Butler, 1996, p. 42). Black soldiers see job stability and security, distinct pathways to advancement

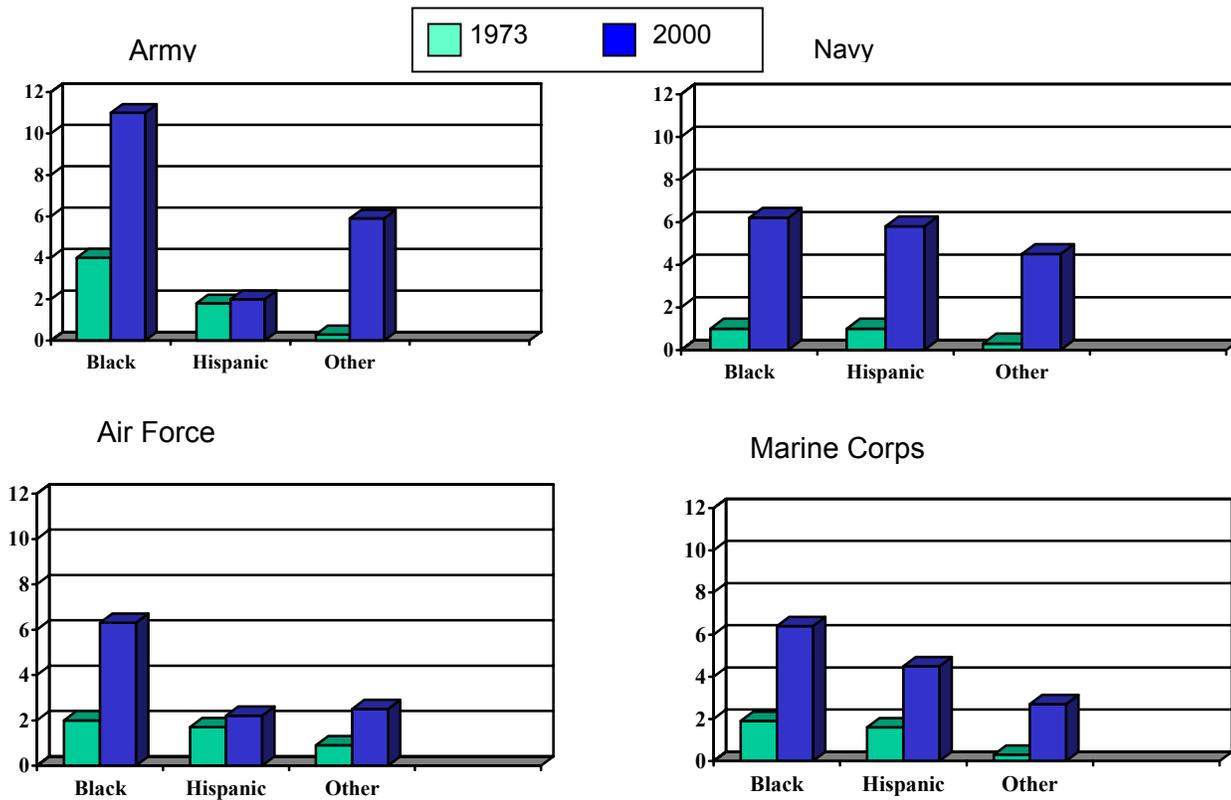
through promotion (Daula et al., 1990, p. 718), and an in-service earnings advantage (Phillips et al., 1992, pp. 352-55) to the army as a long- or short-term career choice.

The army's 7,500 officers represent the largest number of black executives in any organization in the country. They are trained at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, but most come from the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs housed at universities. The growth in the number of black army officers has been due primarily to the expansion of ROTC at historically black colleges and universities. The growth in the army's black officer corps over the last two decades is evident from Figure 3, which shows progress of other minority groups, as well as expanding opportunities in the navy, air force, and marine corps.

VI. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

During the recent drawdown of military forces between 1987 and 1997, there was considerable concern that minorities and women would be disproportionately affected by the reduction in force end strength. However, the "last-hired, first-fired" phenomenon did not prevail in the military. Among black officers, the percentage actually rose during this

FIGURE 3 Minorities as Percent of the Active-Duty Commissioned Officer Corps, by Service in 1973 and 2000



Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

period—from 6.5% to 7.5%—as the proportion of white officers fell. Within the enlisted force, the proportion of blacks rose as well, even as the enlisted ranks fell 35%.

Among Hispanics, the number actually rose during the drawdown in both the enlisted and officer ranks. As a result, their proportions increased substantially. Women, too, benefited in relative terms during the military downsizing—their proportion of the enlisted force and officer corps rose from 11 % to 14% and 10% to 14%, respectively.

In summary, in the years since the advent of the volunteer force, the U.S. military has become more racially and ethnically diverse. It also appears to have successfully integrated women. Moreover, even though the process from entry-level to top leadership positions has taken a long time, both the current top enlisted and officer ranks have richer minority and female

representation than the accession cohorts from which they were drawn.

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