

A Corps of Many Colors:  
The Evolution of the Minority Recruiting Effort at the  
United States Military Academy

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The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s did much to advance minority participation in every aspect of American culture. Those advancements included involving more minorities in government, in higher education, and the officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps of the Army. Amid the historical social changes of this decade and commensurate with the national movement to remove racial subjugation, in 1968, the United States Military Academy (USMA) formed the Equal Opportunity Admissions Office (EOAO). Its purpose was to help implement the Academy's policy of offering equal opportunity for admissions to all regardless of race, color, religion, or national origin.<sup>1</sup>

Expanding the EOAO in 1976, USMA began using recent minority graduates to augment its staff with the objective of increasing the number of ethnic minority Americans at West Point. Named Project Outreach, the program continues today and specifically aims to enhance communication with the minority community and to provide special administrative assistance and encouragement to minority candidates seeking admission. Viewing the Academy's emphasis on minority recruiting, in light of the social issues of that time, an interesting question is how USMA chose to respond to the national mandate for equal rights. Why should West Point—an all male, all white institution—go to such lengths to enroll more blacks? What goals did the institution have in mind? This paper will provide perspectives on why and how USMA began recruiting minorities and why, since 1968, the program has continued to this present day. Project Outreach, the Academy's premier recruiting program, was and still is crucial to

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<sup>1</sup> United States Military Academy, "Equal Opportunity," in *Annual Report of the Superintendent, 1968-69* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, 1969), 7.

the institution and the Army in meeting its minority officer accession goals, by giving special service to minority candidates, promoting early awareness to students, and ensuring that USMA attains class composition goals.

A major emphasis in the United States during the 1960s was equal opportunity for all Americans. Black Americans began the civil rights movement to end discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. Responding to this movement, a significant wave of progress in the form of civil rights statutes began. The critical court case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 ended legalized segregation. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925, which created a Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Its mission was to end discrimination in employment by the government and its contractors.<sup>2</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared that no person could be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, or national origin under federal financially assisted programs or activities. Finally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed local poll taxes and other bars to black voting in the South. These were dramatic victories that helped advance the Constitution's promise of equal opportunity for all minorities and women.<sup>3</sup> The nation, and particularly the South, was very resistant to a commitment to equality. Affirmative action efforts did not truly take hold until it became clear that anti-discrimination statutes alone were not enough to break the problems of society, generated by 300 years of segregation and racial hatred. So, in 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246,

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Cahn, *Stephen Cahn on the History of Affirmative Action*, [article on-line] (accessed 28 October 1997); available from <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/projects/aa/docs/Cahn.html>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Unknown, *Affirmative Action: History and Rationale*, [article on-line] (accessed 28 October 1997); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OP/html/aa/aa02.html>; Internet.

officially sanctioning affirmative actions to insure equality of employment without regard to race, religion, national origin, and sex (added in 1968).<sup>4</sup> The most far-reaching federal expansion of affirmative action began in 1969 with the "Philadelphia Order." Introduced by President Richard Nixon and Labor Secretary George Schultz, the plan established goals and a timeline by which special measures would be implemented to increase minority employment opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the unique relationship between educational opportunity and employment opportunity, most blacks viewed education as the escape route from poverty.<sup>6</sup> Black Americans began to look to education for preparation and development to counter the challenges forced upon them by the nation's social condition. Responding to this societal challenge, many of the nation's college campuses opened their doors to minority students. The effort was overwhelming, and minority enrollment increased drastically. For example, there were approximately 150,000 Black students in higher education in 1960; by 1975 that number had risen to over one million.<sup>7</sup> It was at this time that Academy leaders and the Admission Department realized that minority representation in the Corps of Cadets and the Army officer corps was lacking.<sup>8</sup> In 1968 the Department of Admissions created the Equal Admissions Opportunity Program to increase the ethnic minority representation in the Corps of Cadets.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>6</sup> SP Joel Morgovsky, *The US Military Academy and the Issue of Race in Higher Education: A Perspective* (West Point: USMA Office of Institutional Research, 1970), 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> American Council on Education, *Minorities on Campus: A Handbook for Enhancing Diversity* (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1989), 1.

<sup>8</sup> COL Manley E. Rogers, interview by author, 24 October 1997, telephone conversation, Belfast, ME.

Prior to the creation of the Equal Opportunity Admissions Program, the Academy's minority representation was very bleak. In 1869, sixty-seven years after the Academy was founded, the first black was accepted as a cadet. Eight years later, in 1877, Henry O. Flipper became the first black graduate. In more recent times, the 1950s saw no more than twenty blacks enrolled at the Academy at any one time (all classes combined); in the 1960s there were no more than eighteen black cadets enrolled. In sum, by 1968, almost a century after admitting the first black, West Point had only graduated 68 blacks (of seventy-nine blacks admitted). In those years never had a West Point class exceeded one percent blacks.<sup>9</sup> In fact, never before the Class of 1968 had more than ten minority (black) cadets entered the Academy in one class.<sup>10</sup>

Why USMA began recruiting and admitting more minorities in response to the racial imperatives of the time can be described as purely obligatory. Academy officials suggest that their decision to begin minority recruitment was in many ways a pioneering effort. Officials claimed that though the executive branch's commitment to equal opportunity was well underway in the form of affirmative action, the institution faced no pressure to enroll larger quantities of or to recruit more minorities. They also contend that USMA was ahead of the other service academies in its efforts and found itself in a position where it had to convince the Department of the Army (DA) that minority recruitment was the right thing to do.<sup>11</sup> Evidence to the contrary, however, suggests that

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<sup>9</sup> MAJ Charles W. Pope, Jr. and COL Manley E. Rogers, "The Director of Admissions Assesses the USMA Admissions Program," *Assembly Magazine*, June 1985, 12.

<sup>10</sup> United States Military Academy, "USMA Ethnic Groups: Classes of 1966-1997, 1997 (?)," TD (photocopy), p. 1, USMA Office of Policy, Planning and Analysis, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>11</sup> This perspective was shared by both COL Manley E. Rogers and COL Pierce A. Rushton, former Directors of the Department of Admissions. Rogers, interview by author, 24 October 1997.

all of the service academies, to include USMA, began reporting Equal Opportunity Program statistics in 1968, following inquiries from the Assistant Secretary of Defense and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army regarding minority enrollment (especially blacks).<sup>12</sup> Though USMA had more programs targeting blacks, the United States Naval Academy (USNA) seemed to have had a more comprehensive EAO program at the time.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, whereas DA did not give USMA specific recruiting quotas or goals, it directed the Academy to study the current techniques being used to find and encourage black applicants. Additionally, DA suggested that the Academy should have a student body with at least the same percentage of blacks and other minority groups as was typical of the current college population taken as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

Early minority recruitment efforts attempted to utilize Field Force members—retired Army officers and USMA graduates who volunteered to assist the Department of Admissions in identifying potential candidates. Another effort included giving the minority recruiting task to existing Admission Officers. Staff and faculty were used to some extent, to conduct in-home visits to qualified applicants. The Department also tried a direct mail campaign to students identified on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test. Overall, Admissions leadership found that members of the Field Force were too inexperienced and untrained; its members also couldn't make the headway into the minority community to provide the success needed for the program. Because of the

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<sup>12</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Alfred B. Fitt, to the Under Secretary of the Army and the Under Secretary of the Air Force, 27 December 1967, Archives, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY; and Arthur W. Allen, Jr., "Statistics on Minority Group Candidates for the United States Military Academy, 15 July 1968." TMs (photocopy), Archives, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred B. Fitt, "Statistics on Minority Group Candidates for the United States Military Academy, 23 July 1968." TMs (photocopy), Archives, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Admission Officers' workload, they could not possibly give minority recruiting the attention it needed. And though the direct mail program had some success, as other selective schools started using this same recruiting avenue, it became an ineffective option, without special follow-up.<sup>15</sup>

The Equal Admissions Program created in 1968 utilized one black officer, titled the Equal Admissions Opportunity Officer (or Minority Group Recruiting Officer), whose principal duty was to seek qualified candidates from minority ethnic groups. This officer's recruitment efforts focused on identifying potential minority candidates through mass mailings, generated from the National Achievement Test results, establishing and maintaining communication with the minority community, and providing special assistance to those minority candidates seeking admission.<sup>16</sup> The success of this early minority recruiting program became evident when because of this one officer's efforts the Academy admitted forty-four black cadets with the Class of 1973. As other colleges and universities began intensifying their efforts to attract minority students, USMA created a second position within the Equal Admissions Opportunity Branch. In 1972 the Department of the Army authorized and fully funded both positions at West Point.

One of the major issues among colleges, with the influx of minorities, was that of special selections. Should race be a consideration in the admission of an applicant to a college? Many colleges and universities all over the country initiated modifications to admissions' criteria and curriculum in order to accommodate greater numbers of minority students.<sup>17</sup> On the surface the argument revolved around the question of

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<sup>15</sup> Rogers, 24 October 1997.

<sup>16</sup> USMA, *Annual Report of the Superintendent, 1968-1969*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Morgovsky, 11.

admission qualifications and the consequences of special admissions programs—lesser qualified minorities depriving more qualified majority students of a place in the classroom (i.e. reverse discrimination). The deeper issue, however, was the question of whether selective schools should have absolute standards. At West Point the issue focused on a perception of unspoken quota systems.<sup>18</sup>

The appropriation for special selections at the Academy was authorized by Title 10 of the U. S. Code. Special selections was a provision written into the admissions academic policy that allowed for the selection of fully qualified candidates prior to a nomination. Written long before the heavy recruitment of minorities (or women), the policy was primarily used for athletes.<sup>19</sup> After USMA began its focused recruitment of minorities, special selection efforts were needed to fulfill class composition goals.

Whereas many believed that a special selectee was an unqualified candidate, admitted on lesser terms, in actuality he was a fully qualified candidate who may have had identified risks. Applicants whose files reflected low scores in any of three areas to include academics, physical fitness, or leadership potential, received an in-depth review to assess that candidate's qualification. All candidates not deemed qualified were rejected, or as in the case of many minorities, were offered admission to the United States Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPS).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> CPT Ralph B. Tildon, Jr., "West Point and Special Admissions," *Admissions Office Information Bulletin*, 1 September 1977, 1.

<sup>19</sup> COL Pierce A. Rushton, Jr., interview by author, 24 October 1997, telephone conversation, Shawnee, KS.

<sup>20</sup> According to Maureen Velez, Prep School is by far the one factor that enables USMA to meet its compositions goals each year. For this reason Admissions greatly manages the numbers of blacks and Hispanics placed into Prep School. Maureen Velez, interview by author, 27 October 1997, West Point, NY.

The argument for use of special selections at the Academy went well beyond the needs of the normal college or university. For the Academy, the issue of special selections in minority recruiting was an issue of the needs of the Army. Specifically, in the Army of the early 1970s, 25% of the population comprised enlisted blacks yet less than 6% of officers were black. In the same way, 3.5% of the Army's enlisted persons were Hispanic, while less than 1% of officers were Hispanic. After almost two decades of civil rights initiatives, the Army, like the nation, was characterized by continued racial tension and problems of perception. In short, the Army needed minority role models for this large number of enlisted counterparts.<sup>21</sup>

Despite how the Academy justified admitting more minorities, even through the legality of special selections, there was some internal opposition. As an institution, the Academy appears to have presented few obstacles to inhibit the acceptance of blacks.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the Academy's only outspoken emphasis was to ensure that black cadets were meeting the same standards of admission as other cadets.<sup>23</sup> This perception was, however, somewhat altruistic. Along with the prevailing stigma that minority students, admitted by special selection, lowered the quality of West Point's academic program, resistance to increased minority presence was exhibited in other ways. "The Corps of Cadets, with its own organization and the mentality of a 17-21 year old youth, was apparently the greatest obstacle to the social integration of [blacks] at West Point."<sup>24</sup> Similar to the resistance at civilian colleges, black cadets often felt unwanted and found

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<sup>21</sup> Tildon, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Morgovsky, 7.

<sup>23</sup> COL Arthur Hester, (USAR), interview by author, 5 November 1997, Troy, MI.

<sup>24</sup> Morgovsky, 7.

themselves severely limited socially in the Corps.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, there were few minority faculty or staff members assigned to West Point. Whereas several colleges had begun to elicit minority recruiting staffs, USMA enlisted only a single minority recruiter. As the Administration's passive role to end hazing during the nineteenth century was much regarded as silent support, the institution's slowness to address the social support structure for the minority cadets in many ways presented a silent opposition to minority presence on campus.

After making the decision to increase minority enrollment at USMA and witnessing the initial success of the Equal Admissions Opportunity Program, minority (black) enrollment in the classes of the early 1970s was unexpectedly low. The Academy had set as a goal "to have the institution represent the country ethnically, much as the Congress intends West Point to represent the country geographically."<sup>26</sup> The Admissions Department wrestled with the problem and decided the best way to reach its objective and to increase the number of quality black graduates would be to emulate the success of football recruiting.<sup>27</sup> At the Academy, for example, Army football used young graduates of like ethnicity to go out and personally visit highly recruited players. With this in mind, Admission's leadership realized that, if they wanted to promote the advantages of a USMA education to the minority community, they had to go out and meet the community to create interest. As in the football program, they wanted to show the minority community role models who were of close age and who had experience in

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<sup>25</sup> Hester, 5 November 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Pope and Rogers, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Rogers, 24 October 1997.

both the Army and West Point as cadets. These events were the catalyst for the creation of the USMA Equal Admissions Opportunity Augmentation Program.

As early as 14 July 1975 USMA began requesting authorization for the annual assignment of officers to assist the minority recruitment effort. Entering the Academy that summer was the Class of 1979, which set a record for the enrollment of black Americans at USMA (86 or 6%). Minorities made up 9.6% of the total class. This same year, however, USMA, for the first time, fell behind USNA and the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) in the total enrollment of minorities.<sup>28</sup> Making a plea that the Army was more representative of the national population than the other services, Superintendent Lieutenant General Sidney B. Berry requested DA support for the addition of five officers (three blacks, one Puerto Rican, one Hispanic) for a six-month temporary duty (TDY) period in the Equal Admissions Program. In light of the enrollment concerns, Berry proposed two goals for the Class of 1980: admission of more minorities than any past year and an increase of black enrollment to at least 100 cadets.<sup>29</sup>

During the beginning years of the minority recruitment effort and the Outreach Program, the Academy developed class composition goals without DA's input. Guided by the overarching goal of minority representation within the Corps of Cadets commensurate with that of the national population, Academy leaders were adamant in stressing that though the equal admissions programs were described in affirmative action

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<sup>28</sup> LTG Sidney B. Berry, USMA Superintendent to LTG Harold G. Moore, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, 14 July 1975, Historical File, USMA Department of Admissions, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

terms, DA never pressured the Academy to admit certain numbers of the various ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup> It was not until 1976 that DA started specifying goals to the Academy, in accordance with the Department of the Army Affirmative Action Plan goals (DA AAP).<sup>31</sup> These initial goals provided partial guidelines for the admission and graduation of minorities, but in particular black Americans. For example during School Year (SY) 76-77, USMA DA AAP Goals for opening enrollment were 5.5% for blacks and unspecified for other minorities. That year USMA admitted 5.6% blacks and 4.8% other minority groups.<sup>32</sup>

In January 1976 West Point received permission to have five minority officers augment its Equal Admissions Staff for a six-month TDY period, coinciding with the public school academic cycle. Called "West Point's Project Outreach," the program started out as a youth motivation program aimed at eighth and ninth graders, to inform young Americans of the opportunities available through post-secondary education for those who were academically prepared. Their focus at this level came about as a result of experiences over several years of minority recruiting that indicated that the main constraint to the admission of greater numbers of ethnic minorities was linked to an inadequacy of academic preparation. Many students who had the physical and academic potential to succeed simply had failed to prepare themselves properly for college while in high school.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, Outreach Officers' major job was to travel throughout the

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<sup>30</sup> Rushton, 24 October 1997.

<sup>31</sup> LTC T.M. Partin, USMA Adjutant General to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, 13 April 1979, Historical File, USMA Department of Admissions, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Enclosure 4, "USMA Minority Opening Enrollment."

<sup>33</sup> COL F. R. Pole, to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, U. S. Army, 3 June 1976, Archives, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

country to visit junior high schools and high schools to talk with students about education, college preparation, and future careers. In addition, they visited candidates, made media appearances, and gave presentations to potentially admissible eleventh-graders and twelfth-graders to discuss West Point as a college option.<sup>34</sup> The program was immediately successful in terms of feedback from teachers and counselors. The first group of officers alone visited more than 85 cities and spoke to more than 25,000 students.<sup>35</sup>

Though the newly formed Outreach Program showed some subjective signs of success, the Academy still saw no immediate impact in the number of minority cadets entering the Academy in subsequent years. Partially due to competition from the other service academies, but mostly due to the dwindling pool of qualified minority (black) candidates and the numbers of minorities motivated to pursue a military career. To deal with these issues, the Office of Admissions increased the number of Equal Admissions programs. Additions included sending EOAO staff (and Outreach Officers) to the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS) college interview sessions held around the country. EOAO began using minority cadets during Thanksgiving Cadet Public Relations Council (CPRC). It also continued the staff and faculty visit program, utilizing minority staff members to visit highly admissible high school students.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> United States Military Academy, "EAO Lieutenants," *Admissions Office Information Bulletin*, 18 February 1976, 5.

<sup>35</sup> United States Military Academy, "Project Outreach—1977," *Admissions Office Information Bulletin*, 1 September 1976, 2.

<sup>36</sup> United States Military Academy, "Equal Admissions," *Admissions Office Information Bulletin*, 1 February 1977, 7.

Over the years Project Outreach did undergo some structural changes. After 1978 a black female was included in the racial mix of officers. In 1980 the Admissions Office increased the number of officers to seven to align Outreach Officers geographically with the seven regions of the country, much like Admission Officers in the Department were organized. In 1985 field offices opened in Texas and California to accommodate minority recruiting in those regions. In 1993, because of budget constraints, the Department closed the field offices and reduced the number of officers to six. Finally, in 1997, the tour of duty for Outreach Officers was extended to a thirteen month permanent change of station (PCS). In spite of these changes, though, the program has sustained the same three objectives it had in 1976: to inform the minority community of the advantages and availability of a West Point education, to assist and encourage candidates through the admissions process, and to expand the pool of quality minority high school students.<sup>37</sup>

Today, USMA Admissions and the Equal Admissions Opportunity Program remains committed to the philosophy of enrolling a cadet population commensurate with the national population. As minority recruiting within the highly selective colleges and universities becomes more competitive and challenging, the minority recruitment efforts have more and more rallied around Project Outreach to provide solutions to current accession challenges. Chief among those challenges is the recruitment of black candidates. Trends indicate that the changing demographics and market trends in America paint a very bleak picture for the future. High school graduation rates and

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<sup>37</sup> CPT Janett M. Richardson, "Equal Admissions, 16 March 1977," TMs (photocopy), History File, USMA Department of Admissions, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

college participation have decreased steadily since 1976 for Hispanics. Likewise, studies show that the black male seems to be disappearing from higher education altogether; roughly one-third of all black teenagers never graduate from high school, and the number of black males in college fell by more than 7% between 1976 and 1986.<sup>38</sup> Considering the report of a recent U. S. Department of Education study that showed that only .4% of the black graduates from high school would meet the criteria for admission into a highly selective college, the end result is an inadequate "supply" of students to meet class composition "demands" of the nation's selective schools.<sup>39</sup>

Currently, USMA focuses its minority recruitment effort on the attainment of its yearly composition goals. Officials determine Project Outreach's success by these statistics more than any others.<sup>40</sup> Early years of minority recruiting boasted DA AAP goals of 12% blacks and commensurate rates of Hispanics and other minorities (Asian and Native American).<sup>41</sup> Though African Americans still make up roughly 12% of the national population, the relatively small number of qualified black candidates versus the wide variety of opportunities available to this select group makes these earlier goals unrealistic. Current DA Affirmative Action Plan states that, "USMA admission rates for qualified applicants in all racial/ethnic categories should be comparable to the overall admission rate for all qualified considered for admission."<sup>42</sup> Based on this guidance

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<sup>38</sup> United States Military Academy, "Minority Admission Program, (?)," TMs (photocopy), History File, USMA Department of Admissions, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>39</sup> MAJ Edwin Tifre, "Minority Recruitment, 26 March 1997," TMs (photocopy), History File, USMA Department of Admissions, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>40</sup> Velez, 27 October 1997.

<sup>41</sup> United States Military Academy, "Enrollment of Black Americans, (?)," TMs (photocopy), History File, USMA Department of Admissions, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY.

<sup>42</sup> LTC Tom Hinirchsen, "USMA and USMAPS Class Size/Class Composition Goals, 16 December 1996," TMs (photocopy), USMA Office of Policy, Planning and Analysis, West Point, NY.

USMA aspires to admit in each class 4-6% Hispanic, 7-9% African American, .5-1% Native American, and 2-5% Asian American.<sup>43</sup> In terms of African American cadets, USMA has achieved its recruiting goal in five of the last seven USMA classes.<sup>44</sup>

Without Project Outreach, the Academy would not have achieved such successful results. This is the overwhelming reason why Project Outreach has continued through the years and why it is such an imperative program for West Point today.

Finally, though Project Outreach is widely accepted as an essential recruiting tool to attract minority candidates, some still object to this specific approach. Rather than place the responsibility for making class composition goals directly on Outreach, opponents suggest using the previously abandoned idea of making the geographic Admission Officers responsible and utilizing minority Field Force members to accomplish the leg work in the minority community.<sup>45</sup> The argument for this approach lies in the fact that the Academy now boasts a significant pool of minority graduates, many of whom are active in alumni activities. COL Arthur Hester (USAR), former USMA Equal Admissions Officer states, that "when you give the minority recruiting mission to specialized people you are asking for less than stellar results." In particular he refers to the fact that unless all Admission Officers (and Field Force members) are specifically involved in the effort, they will not care.<sup>46</sup> The obvious objections to this plan are an inability to control how many Field Force members participate, their level of commitment, and perhaps an inability to give special service to the minority candidates.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> USMA, *USMA Ethnic Groups*.

<sup>45</sup> Hester, 5 November 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

It has been twenty-one years since the inception of Project Outreach and almost thirty years since the beginning of USMA's formal equal admissions opportunity program, and minority recruiting continues to be a struggle, not only for West Point, but for colleges and universities throughout our nation. What began for many schools as an affirmative action to give disadvantaged minorities a chance through education has continued as the major challenge of this country to give minorities better representation in all aspects of American society. Project Outreach has been at the forefront of Academy minority recruiting efforts because, in aiding the Academy to produce specific composition goals, it has enabled the Army to maintain commensurate minority roles models among its officer corps and for its enlisted soldiers.

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