AUTUMN 2019

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College is supported by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

From the Editors

Certainly everyone in the Hudson River Valley is aware that 2019 is the fiftieth anniversary of the Woodstock Music Festival. In June, The Hudson River Valley Institute held a conference commemorating the festival, and our cover article was presented there as part of a panel on Civil Rights and Black Power in the 1960s. Ty Seidule presents an episode of empowerment for black cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point, illustrating both the result of the progressive thinking of the 1960s and the ongoing nature of our struggle to evolve as a society.

While the Woodstock Festival eventually landed in the town of Bethel, the organizers named it after the town that had been home to artist colonies since 1902. The Woodstock Artists Association was founded by a diverse group of artists in 1919 and is celebrating its centennial this year. Karen Quinn's article on the Arthur C. Anderson Collection is a useful introduction for anyone unfamiliar with that original cast of artists and colonies; Bruce Weber's discussion of their "quest for harmony" reminds us that even intentional communities have to work at it.

The artists of the original Woodstock colonies and the musicians and artists who attended the Woodstock Festival had a common love of nature, whether it was *plein air* painting in the Catskills or dancing in the mud on a Bethel farm. Years before either of them, Alfred B. Street roamed the woods of Sullivan County and wrote about their wonders; Andrew Higgins introduces us to this now-obscure champion of the Catskills and Adirondacks. Likewise, Jeanne Haffner introduces Edith Gifford and the role that she and the New Jersey State Federation of Women's Clubs played in saving the forests of the Palisades and creating the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) in 1900. The PIPC went on to create many more parks throughout New York, establishing Highland Lakes State Park in 1970; Spencer Hogan attests to the silent history that remains there under field, forest, and trail.

This issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review* is dedicated to the late
Brigadier General Patrick J. Garvey, Jr., New York Naval Militia, Retired
(Colonel, United States Marine Corps Reserves, Retired)
and a founding member of the *Hudson River Valley Institute* Advisory Board.

Pat served in senior development roles at the Foreign Policy Association and Rockefeller University and was the post commander at Camp Smith in Peekskill, New York, for the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs. Upon retirement, he became the city manager of Peekskill and then president of the National Maritime Historical Society.
We remember him for his service to the Hudson River Valley Institute.
Semper Fi.

***On the cover*: The photos from a two-page paid "advertisement" that appeared in the 1976 *Howitzer*, the yearbook of The United States Military Academy at West Point.**

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

Vol. 36, No. 1, Autumn 2019

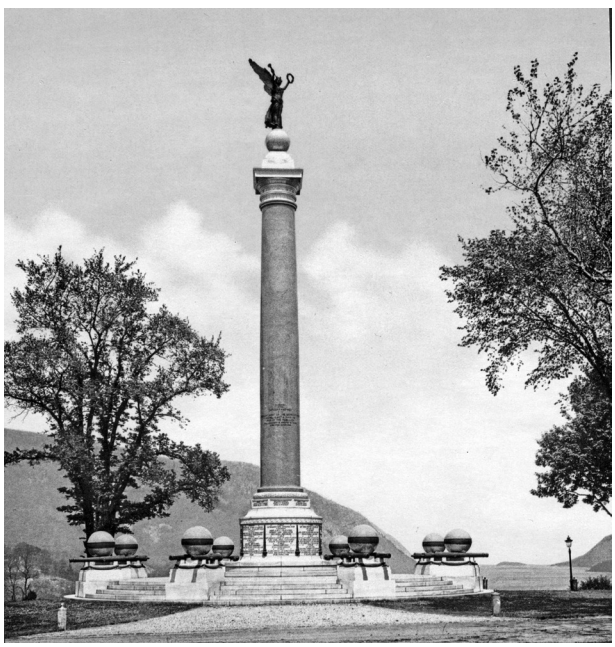
Notes and Documents

Regional History Forum

Book Reviews

Black Power Cadets: How African American Students Defeated President Nixon's Confederate Monument and Changed West Point, 1971–1976

Ty Seidule



Dedicated in 1897, the Battle Monument at Trophy Point recognizes the 2,230 officers and enlisted soldiers who died fighting for the United States in the "War of the Rebellion." When Major General William A. Knowlton described the monument to Richard M. Nixon, the president's response was "Where's the one for the Confederate Army?"

The heyday of the 1968 and 1969 Black Power demonstrations went largely unnoticed at West Point. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the dramatic protests in hundreds of universities across the country saw no similar reaction at West Point. In the spring of 1969, African American students at Cornell, another prestigious New York university, seized Willard Hall, the center of student life. Chanting, "The revolution has come…pick up the gun," students spent the night occupying the building. One of the student leaders of that protest was Eric Evans, a former cadet at West Point. Wearing a bandolier and holding a shotgun, Evans departed Willard Hall the next afternoon with other students who carried knives, clubs, rifles, and handguns. Associated Press photographer Steve Starr reflected the mood of the

nation, "Oh my god. Look at all of those goddamned guns."[1] Just north of West Point in Poughkeepsie, thirty-four African American students walked into Vassar College's Main Building in the early morning of October 30, 1969, and announced, "This is a take-over." Similar protests occurred up and down the Hudson River, at the State University of New York at New Paltz as well as Columbia University in Manhattan. [2]

At the United States Military Academy, the nation's oldest and most prestigious service academy, all was calm. In fact, when the Academy interviewed black cadets in 1969, they were asked if they expected to protest either educational or military policy. To a man, they said no. Yet, two years later, African American cadets at West Point organized quickly, protested dramatically, if peacefully, and convinced a conservative, white institution to recognize their identity as black men. Moreover, the school started promoting the idea of black identity to faculty, staff, cadets, and alumni. Black cadet activism persuaded, even forced, West Point to change from a race-relations laggard to a self-proclaimed leader.[3] At no other time in the Military Academy's 200-year history have cadets protested so vehemently or so effectively. At no other time have cadets had such power. Ironically, the impetus for black cadet activism came from the very top. Commander in Chief (and President) Richard M. Nixon sparked the cadets to action.[4]

President Richard Nixon's Visit to West Point

On May 27, 1971, on a beautiful late spring day in New York's Hudson River Valley, Richard Nixon made his first and last visit to West Point as president. His trip marked a low point for the U.S. Army. American participation in the Vietnam War was winding down, but racial tension had reached alarming rates. In 1970 and 1971, the NAACP and the Department of Defense had released damning reports of racial inequality and black

1 Donald Alexander Downs, *Cornell '69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5. Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley, 2012), 1–12. Ibram H. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965–1972* (New York, 2012), 103–106 and 127–129. Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York, 2010), 155–157. For an overview see Jonathan B. Fenderson, " 'When the Revolution Comes': New Perspectives on Black Student Activism and the Black Studies Movement," *Journal of African American History* 89 (Fall 2013): 607–622. Kimberley L. Philips, *War! What is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles & the US Military From World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Richard Stillman, II, "Racial Unrest in the Military: The Challenge and the Response," *Public Administration Review*, Vol 34, No. 3 (May–June 1974), 221–229. Charles C. Moskos, Jr., "The American Dilemma in Uniform: Race in the Armed Forces," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 406, "The Military and American Society" (March 1973): 94–106.

2 Claudia Lynn Thomas '71: "Takeover of Main Building, 1969," Vassar Encyclopedia. http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/interviews-reflections/claudia-lynn-thomas.html. M.S. Handler, "State U Refuses a New Paltz Inquiry," New York Times, July 17, 1970, 21. Columbia University Libraries, "1968: Colombia in Crisis." https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/1968

3 For a short overview of African American history at West Point see Ty Seidule, "From Slavery to Black Power: The History of Racial Intolerance at West Point, 1780–2015" in *Intolerance: Political Animals and Their Prey* edited by Bruce Chilton and Robert Tully, (New York: Hamilton Books, 2017). Brian Shellum, *Black Cadet in a White Bastion: Charles Young at West Point* (New York: Bison Books, 2006). John Marszalek, *Assault at West Point: The Court Martial of Johnson Whittacker* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2004). For the twentieth century see Isaac Hampton II, *The Black Officer Corps: A History of Black Officer Military Advancement from Integration through Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 2012). Krewasky Salter, *The Story of Black Military Officers*, 1861–1948 (London: Routledge, 2014).

4 Student Survey, 1969, Special Collections and Archives, United States Military Academy Library, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, referred to hereafter as USMA.

soldiers' unwillingness to stand for injustice.[5] In addition to problems with race relations, the army suffered from endemic drug use, poor morale, and indiscipline. The army had lost its heroic reputation earned in World War II. Instead, incidents like the My Lai massacre, where army soldiers slaughtered Vietnamese civilians, created the impression of an ill-disciplined force outside the American mainstream. Nixon came to West Point to deliver a sober message. He declared, "The symptoms of trouble in the army are plain enough, from drug abuse to insubordination." The president asked the graduating seniors of the Class of 1971 to lead a "moral rebirth" of the army.[6] At most colleges, Nixon's presence would result in near riots. As the commander in chief, he received a rousing welcome from the cadets. By all accounts, he loved his visit and stayed longer than his staff wanted.[7]

After finishing his talk and watching a parade, Nixon joined the Academy's superintendent (the school's president), Major General William A. Knowlton, in the president's Lincoln Continental convertible for a tour. Together they drove to Trophy Point, a dramatic vista on a bluff overlooking the Hudson River. In addition to hundreds of captured enemy weapons from the American Revolution through the Spanish American War, Trophy Point holds West Point's most important memorial—Battle Monument, a seventy-foot granite column erected to the 2,230 Regular Army officers and soldiers who fought and died for the United States during the Civil War. In 1897, a West Point professor dedicated the monument to those who "freed a race and welded a nation."[8]

As Knowlton explained the purpose of the Battle Monument, Nixon remarked, "Oh, that's fine general. Where's the one for the Confederate Army?"

Knowlton replied, "Well sir, we don't have one up here."

"Oh, General," the president replied, "I've just been down to Alabama and I got a wonderful reception down there, and this is a time of healing of all these things, and this is the theme of my administration, bringing us together, and you've got to get a monument up here to those Confederate dead."[9]

A Confederate memorial at West Point might help protect Nixon's southern flank and his election prospects in 1972. He had recently returned from a trip to meet Southern governors, including Alabama Governor George Wallace. Wallace had run as an independent in the 1968 presidential election and won several states. He looked to be even more formidable in 1972. Nixon pondered a worst-case scenario in which Wallace would win enough states to deprive him or the Democratic nominee of a majority of

5 NAACP, *The Search for Military Justice: Report of an NAACP Inquiry into the Problems of Negro Serviceman in West Germany* (New York: NAACP, 1971). Department of Defense, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, "U.S. Military Race Relations in Europe–September 1970."

6 Richard Nixon, "Remarks to the Corps of Cadets at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York," 29 May 1971, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3029.

7 General William A. Knowlton, USA Retired, interviewed by Lieutenant Colonel David W. Hazen, Senior Officer Oral History Program, U.S. Army Military History Institute, 1982, 611.

8 Charles Larned, "The Battle Monument at West Point," *Harper's Weekly*, 12 June 1897, 594. James Tyrus Seidule, " 'Treason is Treason': Civil War Memory at West Point," *Journal of Military History* 76 (Winter 2012), 427–452.

9 Charles D. W. Canham to the Superintendent, "Memorial to West Pointers who served the Confederacy," 16 July 1971, USMA. Knowlton, Oral History interview 612–613.

Electoral College votes. In that scenario, the House of Representatives would elect the president, with each state receiving one vote. Because the Democrats controlled the House, Nixon would lose.

The purpose of Nixon's Confederate Monument had nothing to do with bringing people together. A new monument on West Point would exploit race for political gain. Several books published in late 1969 and early 1970 looked at Wallace's success as part of a potent white backlash against the racial inclusion of Civil Rights legislation and economic gains by African Americans. In early 1970, Samuel Lubell wrote in *The Hidden Crisis in American Politics* that Wallace received high vote tallies in Northern white communities that abutted black districts. Increases in black prosperity had pushed African Americans closer to white neighborhoods, inciting fear among majority whites. Lubell wrote that academics had assumed that the South would eventually resemble the North in race relations. "Wallace raised the prospect that the North, as it changes, may become more southernized."[10]

Lubell was a respected political journalist. Kevin Phillips, the author of *The Emerging Republican Majority*, written in 1969, was a wunderkind in Nixon's 1968 campaign. One of the first analysts to master computerized voting trends, Phillips was an indispensable, although maligned, figure in 1968. One Nixon aide called him "The Computer." In his book, Phillips wrote that white fear of black Americans would drive a future Republican majority. To prod the new majority, Phillips urged the Republican Party to endorse black voting rights in the South in order to push more Southern whites into the Republican Party. Politics wasn't hard, Phillips argued. Find out who hates whom. "That is the secret." Historian Dan T. Carter writes that Phillips' book showed both brilliance and "breathless cynicism." [11]

Nixon paid attention. In a memo written by White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, Nixon ordered his staff to "use Phillips as an analyst—study his strategy—don't think in terms of old time ethnics, go for Poles, Italians, Irish, must learn to understand Silent Majority…don't go for Jews and Blacks." After 1970, Nixon abandoned his moderate policies on race to maintain Republican majorities in the South and elsewhere. Stoking racial fears in white America became a strategy for dealing with the threat of George Wallace. As Nixon confided to biographer Herbert Parmet, Democratic nominee George McGovern provided little worry. "My concern was about Wallace." The Confederate Monument proposal at West Point reflected Nixon's abandonment of racial moderation, his move to neutralize Wallace, and his sign to white America that he was on their side.

10 Samuel Lubell, *The Hidden Crisis in American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 105 in Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963–1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University), 41.

11 Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New York: Arlington House, 1969). Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 44.

A Confederate Monument attached to the apolitical Military Academy might help Nixon create a majority for the 1972 campaign.[12]

Back at the White House, Nixon sent a letter to Knowlton thanking him for a visit that proved a "great boost to my morale." In a long postscript, he ordered the superintendent to create a monument to "West Pointers who lost their lives serving on the Southern side." To track the Academy's progress, Nixon assigned the project to the deputy assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, a 1947 graduate of West Point. Two years earlier, Haig had served at West Point as a lieutenant colonel. Plucked from relative obscurity to serve on the National Security Council, Haig began a meteoric rise from colonel to four-star general in increasing positions of power at the White House, where he became known as a "go-to-guy" for his hard work and stellar staff work. If Nixon needed a tough or unpleasant task accomplished, he turned to Haig. During the difficult Watergate years, Haig served as Nixon's chief of staff. After he retired from the army, Haig would serve as Ronald Reagan's secretary of state. However, in 1971 he was known as the most political of generals, a soldier who knew how to use power aggressively.[13]

The president wanted a memorial and Haig made sure the superintendent received the message. Haig called Knowlton the day after Nixon's visit and many times thereafter. The president was not suggesting a Confederate memorial. The commander in chief demanded a statue, a big statue. Haig told Knowlton that the monument was the president's "personal initiative" and he wanted it completed on an "urgent basis," in time for the Republican Convention the next year.[14]

By mid-June, Knowlton appointed an ad hoc committee to create a proposal. He realized that the Confederate project had "real hazards." In particular, Knowlton wondered how "one gets the support of black cadets and graduates," a prescient concern. He hoped the committee could somehow finesse the president's "priority project." The committee recommended the use of a building given to West Point after the 1964 World's Fair. The Academy could create an exhibit in the building that recognized all West Pointers who fought in the war. Rather than creating a Confederate Monument, the committee suggested an exhibit that would tell the story of the Civil War from West Point's perspective. The exhibit would highlight both those who stayed true to the United States and those who renounced their commission to fight for the Confederacy. By creating an exhibit inside a building, the committee hoped to placate the president without creating a paean to the Confederacy. Unfortunately for Knowlton, Haig had kept in close contact with the

12 Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 50–51. Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 81, 100–104.

13 Richard Nixon to William Knowlton, 1 June 1971, Box 56, Trip 20, White House Central Files, West Point, New York, 28 May 1971, Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA. Referred to hereafter as NPL.

14 Alexander Haig to the President, 31 May 1971, Box 377, National Security Files, Subject Files, President's West Point Speech, "Follow-up actions resulting from your visit to the US Military Academy," (Stamped "The President has seen"), NPL. Alexander Haig to Jay Dymek, 15 November 1993, author's files. Knowlton, Oral History interview, 613.

committee and fed the president inside information. In September, Nixon vetoed the idea of a discrete museum exhibit. He demanded an ostentatious monument for Confederates. Thwarted, Knowlton now had to create a new plan. Nixon wanted the project completed in less than a year, an ambitious timeline to plan, fund-raise, build, and dedicate a monument.[15]

The first order of business was finding money. Nixon provided plenty of guidance to Knowlton but no funding. The president had left little time to ask Congress for money and the superintendent knew that a Confederate Monument would draw the wrath of the Congressional Black Caucus. Instead, Knowlton contacted the Association of Graduates, West Point's alumni foundation, to fund the monument. As a non-profit, private organization, only the association could raise money for the federally funded college.

In October, after Knowlton made a formal request to fund the Confederate Monument, the association's Board of Directors met and had a contentious debate. Many argued that the Academy had never had a Confederate Monument because officers who fought against the United States were traitors who abrogated their oath. As evidence, they pointed out that no Confederate was buried in the West Point cemetery. Moreover, federal law barred the recognition of "unworthy subjects," code for Confederates, in West Point's Valhalla, Cullum Memorial Hall. The founder of the Association of Graduates and the namesake of the memorial hall, Major General George W. Cullum, the Academy's superintendent at the end of the Civil War, had written that the Academy should never forgive Confederates, who, he said, "forgot the flag under which they were educated to follow false gods."[16]

Captain Arthur Hester, a 28-year-old African American and the youngest member of the Association of Graduates' board, led the charge against the monument. The Academy's minority admissions officer and a 1965 West Point graduate, Hester argued stridently that Confederates resigned their commissions to fight against the United States in order to create a slave republic. How could West Point countenance a monument to them in 1971? Hester worked with Frank Borman, who commanded Apollo 8, the first mission to fly around the moon, to convince his fellow board members not to fund the president's monument. Hester faced a formidable roster of West Point graduates who either wanted to help the superintendent or who supported the Confederate memorial, including General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Harold K. Johnson, former chief of staff of the Army. Other older men thought a Confederate Monument a great idea and believed they could fund it through the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which had previously funded prizes and a portrait of Robert E. Lee. The pro-monument group proved formidable. Hester and Borman lost after a "heated discussion" among the members. The board agreed to raise money for a Confederate Monument, but the close vote, eighteen to sixteen was a less-than-ringing endorsement. In fact, many agreed

15 Major General Knowlton to Colonel Griess and Colonel Nye, 14 June 1971, "Statue to West Pointers in the Confederacy," USMA. Alexander Haig to Jay Dymek, 15 November 1993.

16 George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1879), xii.

to the monument only because of the superintendent's direct request; the Association of Graduates charter required it to support the superintendent. The chairman promised the board that he would tell Knowlton of the deep division on this issue.[17]

West Point and Minority Recruitment

Knowlton had another reason to stop the monument. He knew that the negative publicity surrounding a Confederate Monument would devastate the Academy's recruitment efforts. West Point was trying to increase the number of African American cadets to overcome the school's dismal record of minority admissions. In the 100 years since African Americans first came to West Point in 1870, seventy-three black cadets had graduated from it. The Naval Academy was even worse, graduating its first African American in 1946. By the late 1960s, the institutional racism that allowed for only a handful of African American cadets was under assault. During the inauguration of President Nixon in January 1969, West Point cadets assumed their usual position leading the army contingent in the inaugural parade. This time, however, African Americans lining the parade route in Washington, D.C., yelled at the formation, asking why there were no black cadets. While large numbers of African American soldiers fought in Vietnam, there were only a tiny percentage of black officers to lead them. To address this problem, the army ordered West Point to start tracking minority admissions in 1968, pressuring the Academy to increase the number of black cadets quickly. Later that year, it added one African American officer to the Admissions team and told him to start recruiting more black candidates. He brought results immediately. In the summer of 1969, West Point admitted forty-seven black cadets, dwarfing the number brought in during the previous nine years combined. With the change in numbers came a change in attitudes. As one cadet pointed out, "Until these plebes [freshman] arrived, it wasn't possible to have a black identity. There just weren't enough of us." By the fall of 1971, 119 black cadets were attending West Point, enough to change culture. As Knowlton would later describe it, going from "eight black cadets in a class to eighty in a class is like nuclear fission. Tremendous stresses were placed upon the blacks at West Point and upon the administration."[18]

The Class of 1972, the last class admitted before the creation of the Equal Admissions program, had only eight African American cadets, less than one percent of the class. Their informal leader was Percy Squire, the highest-ranking black cadet in the corps,

17 William Knowlton to Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army, "Possible Civil War Memorial," 4 November 1971, USMA. Minutes of the Association of Graduates, 23 October 1971, Association of Graduates Archives, West Point, NY. Percy Squire, conversation with the author, 13 August 2010. David Brice, conversation with the author, 27 July 2012.

18 Timothy Lupfer, conversation with the author, 14 March 2014. West Point was not alone in admitting few African Americans. Yale started their minority recruitment efforts the same year that West Point did. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., conversation with the author, 24 February 2013. Annual Report of the Superintendent, 1968–1969, 7, USMA. "Negro Cadets at the Academies Triple," *Washington Post*, 25 August 1967. Thomas Fleming, "West Point Cadets Now Say, 'Why Sir?'," *New York Times*, 5 July 1970, 126. Fred S. Hoffman, "Record Total of Negroes Attend Service Schools," *Washington Post*, 21 July 1965. James Ferron, "Blacks in The Long Gray Line," *New York Times*, 2 June 1991. Jeffrey K. Toomer, "A Corps of Many Colors: The Evolution of the Minority Recruiting Effort at the United States Military Academy," 1997, unpublished paper, USMA. Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 603.

a battalion commander. Confident and charismatic, Squire came to West Point from Youngstown, Ohio. His father was a stove tender who ran a blast furnace for U.S. Steel, and his grandfather was a World War I veteran of the 365th Infantry Regiment. Squire was a multi-sport star, Eagle Scout, and president of the Student Council in his interracial high school. Raised on the tough east side of that Balkanized steel town, he had seen multi-ethnic strife from African American, Irish, Italian, and Puerto Rican communities. He had also witnessed the violent labor movements in Youngstown. Squire understood the need to organize, and he provided black cadets with a rallying point in 1971. His white classmates considered him the most radical member of the class of 1972. Knowlton said Squire "had leadership oozing out of his fingertips."[19]

David Brice, Squire's good friend and fellow leader, came from a starkly dissimilar background—the small, rural town of Blythewood, South Carolina (north of Columbia). Brice attended a segregated high school where he played three sports and was both the class president and valedictorian. Before coming to West Point, he had never had a conversation with a white person. When the local paper published an article about Brice coming to the Military Academy, members of the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on his family's front lawn. Brice's father suspected that the culprits worked at a local store. He took his shotgun there and told the store employees that if they ever set foot on his property again, he would blast them. The KKK never bothered the Brices again. [20]

The transition to West Point from the rural segregated South proved difficult for Brice. He arrived after a journey that required five different family members to take him on various legs of the trip. After he entered the gates, the upperclassmen screamed at him, as they did at all cadets, but for Brice, who had never seen white culture, this was especially hard. Most of the older African Americans left the younger black cadets to fend for themselves. Adding to his stress, Brice's first roommate was a racist from Meridian, Mississippi. The cadet refused to speak to Brice or help him dress for inspections. With no other African American freshman in his company of 120, Brice had no support and endured a tense and lonely year.[21]

While the number of African American cadets increased dramatically the year after Brice and Squire entered, the institutional structures to support them did not. Even before Nixon came to West Point, black cadet activism started to change the Academy in important but not public ways. Cadets wanted a forum to discuss issues important to them, as well as a social outlet to meet African American women. The Academy, however, would not allow a club based on race. Clubs provided one of the few venues to leave campus, making them popular for cadets anxious for even a little freedom. In the late summer of 1971, African American cadets picked the Contemporary Affairs Seminar club for a

19 Timothy Lupfer, conversation with the author, 13 March 2014. Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 615.

20 Richard C. U'Ren, *Ivory Fortress: A Psychiatrist Looks at West Point* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1974), 112. David Brice, conversation with the author, 27 July 2012.

21 David Brice, conversation with the author, 27 July 2012.

hostile takeover. They showed up en masse and easily outvoted the white cadets, creating a de facto black student union. The cadets selected Squire to serve as the seminar's first president. The yearbook described the Contemporary Affairs Seminar as a place where "The problems of Black America are illuminated and discussed within the realm of free interchange." With a critical mass of African American cadets, strong leadership, and a club that provided an organizational setting, the cadets needed only a spark to react. In this setting, Nixon's Confederate Monument proposal was a blowtorch.[22]

Contemporary Affairs Seminar (1972 Howitzer): In 1968, fewer than twenty African American cadets attended West Point. By 1971, the number had reached 119. African American cadets ran the Contemporary Affairs Club as a de facto Black Student Union. Percy Squire, the highest ranking African American cadet, led the club

Black Cadet Activism in Reaction to Nixon's Confederate Monument Proposal

On October 23, 1971, after failing to stop the monument and staring at a sharp deadline, Superintendent Knowlton asked Cadet Squire about the president's proposed Confederate Monument. Knowlton described the reaction as "instant turmoil and chaos." Squire and Brice convened a meeting of all African American cadets the night of October 25, 1971. The meeting ran more than three hours. Anger over the Confederate Monument created seething resentment that bordered on mutiny. Knowlton called it "a screaming, yelling rebellion." Some cadets argued for resigning en masse. Others called for strikes, mass

22 1972 *Howitzer*, USMA. Percy Squire, conversation with the author, 13 August 2010. David Brice, conversation with the author, 27 July 2012.

demonstrations, or sit-ins. If ordered to march in a parade for a Confederate Monument dedication, cadets would refuse to participate or refuse to render honors and sit down during the parade. The underclassman in particular argued for more aggressive tactics. Unlike the seniors who came to West Point in the summer of 1968, younger cadets had been a part of demonstrations and confrontations at their high schools. About fifteen cadets claimed that no white institution could understand their needs, and they argued strenuously for radical, even violent action.[23] Some of the underclassmen accused the seniors of acting like pawns or "Uncle Toms" by bowing to the demands of the white establishment.[24]

Squire and Brice developed a sophisticated strategy to use the most radical cadets as a threat to gain the majority's demands. The first step was writing a "militant manifesto" (some called it the "black manifesto"), modeled after demands made by prisoners during the Attica prison riot two months earlier. The Attica prisoners had a list of twenty-five grievances against their treatment; state authorities worked on those demands until Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered an assault by the police to retake the prison. The African American cadets made thirteen grievances against the Academy. The language also evoked the American colonists' petitions against the British government leading to the American Revolution, and the number thirteen linked to the original United States.[25]

Percy Squire was the primary author of the manifesto and he used Charles A. Reich's *The Greening of America* as an example. A bestseller in the fall of 1971, Reich's book promised a "revolution of the new generation." Squire also had a very able editor to help him craft the document, Captain Joseph Ellis, who taught the Black History course. Ellis later won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for biographies of the founders of the United States.[26]

On November 8, 1971, every black cadet signed the manifesto. That evening, Squire and Brice took the document to Captain Howard Shegog's house to talk to the African American officers who had been following their progress closely. Twenty-one of the twenty-two black officers signed the manifesto. The one officer who refused to sign worried that it would damage his career. For those unfamiliar with military customs, signing the manifesto might seem like an obvious moral imperative—the "right thing" to do. For career officers, however, signing a militant manifesto was an act of moral courage that placed their careers in jeopardy. The near-unanimous public support by the officers put even more pressure on Knowlton. Spurred to action by the cadets, the officers created

23 William Knowlton to Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army, 4 November 1971, "Possible Civil War Memorial," USMA.

24 Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 616. Percy Squire, conversation with the author, August 13, 2010.

25 "Manifesto," 3 November 1971, author's copy. The author is indebted to Arthur Hester who found a copy of the manifesto in his personal papers. It is the only known copy to exist.

26 Joseph Ellis and Robert Moore, *School for Soldiers: West Point and the Profession of Arms* (New York, 1974), 216, 282. Richard C. U'Ren, *Ivory Fortress*, 118. Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America: How the Youth Revolution is Trying to Make America Livable* (New York, 1970). Robert Moore, conversation with the author, 6 August 2012. Frank Slaughter, conversation with the author, 6 August 2012.

the Black Officers Association of West Point to maintain pressure on the Academy and to mentor the young African American cadets.[27]

The next day, Squire delivered the six-page manifesto to the superintendent. It stated that as black Americans, they had entered West Point with "awe and expectation." Their goal was to join the army and improve the quality of leadership for the "black military man." Instead, they found a "long train of abuses and usurpations" and "blatant racism." The manifesto highlighted the long record of racism at the Academy.[28]

The cadets presented their thirteen grievances to a "candid America." The first grievance described the poor treatment of African American cadets and the startlingly few number of black cadets admitted to the Academy prior to 1968. The second point described the lack of recognition for the African American soldier in general and the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments in particular. Called the Buffalo Soldiers by the Indians during the Plains Wars, they fought bravely in the Spanish American War alongside Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Parts of the regiments moved to West Point in 1907 and provided equestrian support to cadets for more than forty years until the Academy discontinued cavalry training. Many of the former Buffalo Soldiers lived in the area and some of them mentored African American cadets.[29]

Six of the grievances described in detail the lack of black cadets, officers, and coaches in positions of leadership throughout the Academy. No area outside of custodial services saw more than a handful of African Americans. The cadets wanted leaders whom they could emulate, and there were precious few. Among the other grievances, the cadets complained that the Black History course was being discontinued and that the Academy took an "unethical approach" in denying a request to invite black speakers who criticized the military.[30] The twelfth grievance described the skits presented by white cadets that portrayed black non-commissioned officers who supported summer training as "fawning sambos and as examples of ignorant incompetence." While the manifesto named no one in particular, it still served as a hard-hitting exposé of institutional racism.[31]

Nixon's Confederate Monument proposal was the thirteenth and final grievance. The cadets charged that Nixon's proposal, more than any other, "seriously weakened the faith we had in the administration to understand our racial pride." They argued that Confederate graduates had "abrogated their oath." The cadets noted that when they became officers, they might lead a military unit against a group of African American citizens like the radical Blackstone Nation. If, as officers, they left the army to accept positions of leadership among "rebelling blacks," they would be punished, even though "emotion, birth and racial ties" attracted them to this cause. If the cadets fought against the U.S. Army, would they

27 Black Officers Association of West Point Contact Roster, undated, author's copy.
28 "Manifesto."
29 "Manifesto."
30 Captain Joseph Ellis, the Black History Course instructor left West Point in 1972.
31 "Manifesto."

be immortalized with a monument? Or would they be court-martialed and thrown in the stockade? The answer was obvious. No American would countenance a memorial to African American West Pointers who fought against their country in the 1970s.

The cadets provided Knowlton with a devastating argument that the Confederates were traitors who fought against their country. No other single foe in American history had killed more U.S. Army soldiers than the Confederate army. Yet, Nixon wanted to put a monument on West Point's sacred ground to the enemies of the United States. Interestingly, the cadets refrained from arguing that a monument would commemorate those who fought to retain slavery. Instead, they made a strategic decision to focus on the oath issue because they realized that it resonated with white senior officers. The cadets clearly understood their audience. Many senior officers at West Point detested the idea of erecting a monument to enemy combatants who killed U.S. soldiers, no matter where they went to school.[32]

With the issuance of the manifesto, Knowlton understood that he and the Academy were in crisis. If the monument process continued, he could face a mutiny. Squire told Knowlton that if the monument were completed, black cadets would refuse to march in any parade to honor it. Under a rash leader, the situation could have led to mass protests and even violence. Knowlton, however, was a savvy, brilliant officer. During World War II, when West Point was short of faculty, Knowlton taught Spanish as a cadet, one of only four cadets selected for this honor. As a young officer, he worked directly for Generals of the Army Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley after World War II, becoming a protégé of Bradley. As a major, he taught political science at West Point. The superintendent at that time, Major General Garrison Davidson, selected Knowlton to sit on what became known as the Ewell Board, created by Davidson to try and modernize West Point's curriculum, which badly needed change. Knowlton saw how Davidson, considered one of the best superintendents in West Point's long history, led the school. Knowlton also had extensive combat experience in World War II and Vietnam, earning three Silver Stars for bravery. As a colonel, Knowlton served as a military attaché in Tunisia, where he learned to speak Arabic, adding to his knowledge of Spanish, French, German, Turkish, Dutch, and Italian. West Point could not have had a more experienced, intelligent, and empathetic leader during the crisis years in the early 1970s.[33]

Knowlton also had served as the Director of the Army Staff before arriving at West Point. That position gave him a strong network within the Pentagon as well as the trust of senior Army leaders. Knowlton wrote a letter to the Army Staff detailing the ferocious reaction of the African American cadets and arguing that a Confederate Monument

32 "Manifesto." Knowlton, "Possible Civil War Memorial." A. Peter Bailey, conversation with the author, 19 July 2012. David Brice, conversation with the author, 27 July 2012. Arthur Hester, conversation with the author, 24 July 2012. Percy Squire, conversation with the author, 12 August 2010. Both Brice and Squire purposefully refrained from bringing up the slavery issue.

33 The latest history of West Point calls Davidson the best superintendent in the twentieth century. Lance Betros, *Carved from Granite: West Point since 1902* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012). Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 616.

would hurt minority recruiting efforts and cause a publicity nightmare. Moreover, he wrote that the current "turmoil" was a mere dress rehearsal for an actual Confederate memorial dedication. West Point could expect mass protest and "uncomplimentary visitors from the Black press [and] the Black Caucus" along with "bad headlines at West Point's expense." Finally, while others worried that killing the monument would make the black community "overconfident," Knowlton felt a decision not to build it would strengthen the "conservative Black element" who wanted to work within the system and "weaken" radicals who wanted to escalate all issues to the press and Black Caucus. The letter masterfully threatened widespread publicity and chaos at a time when the army was already reeling.[34]

Squire and Brice wanted to keep the pressure on Knowlton and the army through limited engagement with the press. *Ebony Magazine*, a leading voice of black America, ran a story by A. Peter Bailey, a founding member of the Organization of Afro-American Unity and one of Malcolm X's pallbearers. His article, "Getting it Together at 'The Point'," served as a reminder that if West Point's leadership failed to listen to the cadets, more publicity was forthcoming. The article mentioned the Confederate Monument proposal in passing, but the real message was that if the project went forward, *Ebony* would lead a journalistic assault on the Academy. The cadets had hemmed in the Academy's leaders, the army, and the president on all sides, leaving only two choices—capitulation or escalation. In recalling this article, Bailey later said that he was impressed with the cadets' strategy because they focused on the oath issue rather than slavery. "Those were some savvy brothers," he noted.[35]

The manifesto's effect was immediate. West Point leaders listened to cadet demands and delivered help, fast. Cadets wanted an improvement in their social lives and that meant two things: the opportunity to meet African American women and the relaxation of hair standards to grow Afros. West Point was a male enclave in 1971. The cadet hostess bused young, mostly white women in from surrounding colleges for dances (known as hops). The few black women that did brave the trip to West Point left unimpressed with the experience of an overwhelmingly white and, often, Southern culture. One young woman recalled her visit to West Point with horror: "We spent the whole evening square dancing!"[36]

The manifesto generated resources from the Academy to fix the problem. The superintendent provided a bus that Brice sent to his uncle, a deacon in Hackensack, New Jersey. The bus came back filled with women from Bloomfield State College. Brice and Squire arranged for use of the superintendent's large boat. As the boat cruised the Hudson River to the melodious strains of the Chi-Lites, the Delfonics, and Marvin Gaye,

34 Knowlton, "Possible Civil War Memorial."

35 A. Peter Bailey, conversation with the author, 19 July 2012.

36 Peter Bailey, "Getting It Together at 'The Point'," *Ebony Magazine* 27, no. 2, (December 1971): 136–144.

African American cadets danced—for a night not that much different from college students anywhere in America. For many cadets, that was real progress.[37]

More progress came when the cadets solved the issue of Afros. When Percy Squire came to West Point in 1968, the Italian barbers employed by the Academy could not cut black hair. Nor did the cadet store sell black hair care products. West Point, although only fifty miles north of New York City, remains a rural enclave. With mountains to the north, south, and west, and a river to the east, there are no close towns catering to African Americans' needs. For that matter, the Academy's leaders rarely let any cadet off campus. Moreover, the written haircut regulations insisted on a "Whitewall," which meant that the neck of cadets must show white skin. Obviously, this standard could not apply to the skin of African American cadets. Close-cropped hair made the cadets feel as though they had "abandoned the black culture." After the manifesto, the Academy's leadership quickly changed the regulations, allowing black hair to be as long as the highest-ranking cadet. Squire, as the highest-ranking African American cadet, grew a large Afro, even though he hated it. His fellow cadets forced him to have long hair so that they could as well. In 1971, West Point's black community wore their hair short, despite the growing popularity of Afros among civilians and soldiers. The following year, African American cadets sported large Afros. One cadet's caption for his yearbook photo explained that he "sometimes looked military when his hair wasn't blown out." The cadet store finally started carrying black hair care products and hiring barbers who could cut black hair. [38]

Cadet demands improved their own living conditions, but they addressed broader issues as well. Memory plays an important role at West Point, home to many monuments recognizing America's military heroes. Yet, no memorial on campus recognized the important role African Americans played in U.S. military history. After the manifesto, the superintendent immediately ordered the memorialization committee to recognize black soldiers. By early 1973, the old cavalry parade ground was renamed Buffalo Soldiers' Field, in recognition of the segregated 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. The ceremony to mark the occasion was an important one for the entire African American community, not just cadets. The Buffalo Soldiers who served at West Point attended the ceremonies along with their families, providing a source of pride that continues to this day.[39]

Other changes followed swiftly. The year before, there had been a fight during the Army Navy football game. A white cadet started waving the Confederate battle flag when the West Point band struck up the Confederate anthem "Dixie." A black cadet snatched it, starting a scuffle. During the monument fight, African American cadets hung Black Power posters that featured a raised fist in their rooms. The Academy's leadership deemed the posters too political and ordered them taken down. The black cadets complained that

37 Interview, David Brice, 27 July 2012. Ellis and Moore, *School for Soldiers*, 216.

38 David Brice, conversation with the author, 24 July 2012. Percy Squire, conversation with the author, 13 August 2010. *Howitzer*, 1974.

39 "Progress Report on the 9th and 10th Cavalry Memorialization," 31 March 1972, Museum, Historical Memorialization Committee Files, West Point Museum, West Point, New York.

white cadets were allowed to have Confederate flags in their rooms, a symbol more offensive than a raised black fist. Quickly, leaders banned the flag as well as the playing of "Dixie."[40]

Cadets told the superintendent that of the hundreds of portraits at West Point, none featured a black officer. In the main ballroom where cadet dances were held, portraits of the U.S. Army generals during the Civil War looked down on the dancers. Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman had pride of place. Black cadets wanted a portrait to recognize an African American military hero. Knowlton immediately wrote to Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., leader of the Tuskegee Airman and the first black graduate of West Point in the twentieth century, to sit for a portrait. Davis refused. Despite repeated attempts by Knowlton, Davis felt a portrait of him as a black man would be divisive. Instead, the superintendent commissioned a bust of Henry O. Flipper, the first African American graduate of West Point.[41]

African American cadets also demanded lecturers who could discuss the black experience. High on their list was U.S. Representative Ronald Dellums, a leader in the Black Caucus and a Democrat from Oakland. Dellums had travelled throughout the country speaking at military bases, highlighting systemic racism through the services. Knowlton balked at bringing a known firebrand to campus and refused the Contemporary Affairs Seminar's request to invite Dellums. The Pentagon overruled Knowlton. Dellums' speech was entitled "The Politics of the Niggers." Despite the incendiary title, Knowlton admitted that Dellums gave one of the most important talks during his four years at the Academy. Dellums told the cadets, "We need you, we blacks, to stay at West Point and go through this place and become Regular Army officers, because we need black Regular Army officers." Here was a committed anti-war activist and a radical African American politician telling black cadets to stay at West Point. Knowlton left the event with a changed opinion of Dellums. Even more incredibly, the Academy allowed cadets to host Nation of Islam Spokesman Louis Farrakhan for a visit and speech. Farrakhan told the cadets, "Don't be lulled to sleep by the fact that you're at West Point. There's no place in the West where you are respected."[42]

While West Point allowed controversial speakers, it still recoiled from negative publicity. West Point has only one source of funding—Congressional appropriations. Its leaders worried that a scandal would jeopardize funding, especially in the early 1970s as the army's budget started to wind down from the Vietnam War. Moreover, the Academy was still finishing infrastructure improvements from the mid-1960s meant to nearly double the number of cadets at West Point. Any loss of Congressional appropriations would be

40 David Brice, conversation with the author, 27 July 2012. The *Howitzer*, 1970 shows cadets waving three large Confederate flags.

41 Knowlton, Oral History 611.

42 Hank Burcham, "Dellums Hailed in Ft. Meade Antiwar Talk," *Washington Post*, 14 April 1971, A20. "Caucus to Investigate Racism in the Military," *Hartford Courant*, 4 November 1971, 4. "Manifesto." Superintendents Annual Report, 1972, Appendix P, "Lectures," USMA. Knowlton, Oral History, 637. Askia Muhammad, "The Historical Legacy of U.S. Military Double Standards Revisited," *The Final Call*, May 24, 2016. http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_103112.shtml

devastating. Two years earlier, West Point did have a scandal: The army fired the previous superintendent, Major General Samuel Koster, for his role in the My Lai massacre. With daily reports of fragging, drug abuse, race riots, and continued negative coverage about Vietnam, the army could ill afford to have its flagship institution mired in a racial crisis. The publicity that would follow a race riot at West Point would dwarf the army's woes elsewhere.[43]

By November, the President's ardor for a Confederate Monument had cooled because Wallace became less of a concern. One reason was the federal grand jury that convened in September 1971 to investigate the finances of Wallace's brother Gerald and other close supporters of the Alabama governor. While the grand jury eventually chose not to indict Gerald Wallace, there were rumors that the Nixon White House had made a deal not to prosecute either Wallace brother if George ran as a Democrat. Twenty-four hours after the Justice Department dropped the investigation against his brother, George Wallace announced his candidacy as a Democrat.[44]

Nixon also found an issue that Wallace had used successfully to appeal to white voters, an issue even more effective than a Confederate Monument—court-ordered desegregation of schools. In 1971, the federal courts mandated sending children to different schools to end de facto segregation. The decision meant sending white suburban children to previously all-black schools or sending African American children to white schools. Either way, white parents and politicians complained loudly about "forced busing" or "forced integration" on racial grounds. One poll reported in late 1971 that seventy-seven percent opposed integration. Nixon told his White House staff to make his opposition to "forcibly integrated schools" as public as possible. Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman said Nixon was "fixated on the issue." Nixon realized that busing was a gut issue that could turn white voters all over the country against the Democrats because no Democratic candidate (except Wallace) criticized forced integration. Nixon would not publicly come out against busing until March 1972, after Wallace won the Florida Democratic primary, but the president had prepped the issue with his staff for months, even contemplating a constitutional amendment against forced busing.[45]

On one of the many calls between Haig and Knowlton, the superintendent again tried to have the White House back down from the president's Confederate Monument proposal. Haig told Knowlton, "You've been given an order by the commander in chief."

Knowlton responded, "Yes, but I can tell you that the commander in chief is going to find that a very tainted order, because connected with it is going to be a massive

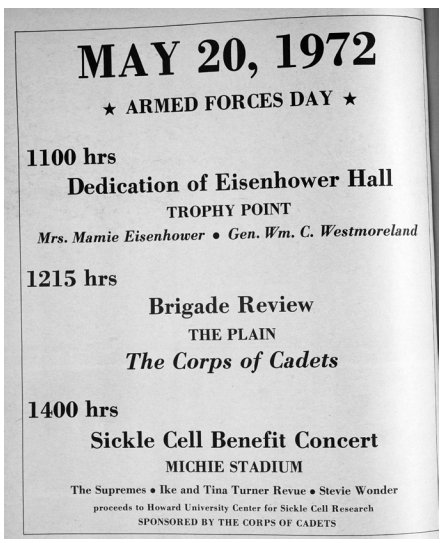
43 David Stout, "Gen. S.W. Koster, 86, Who Was Demoted After My Lai, Dies," New York Times, February 11, 2006.

44 Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 422–424.

45 Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 144–149. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 422–423. See Davison M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) and Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

rebellion…at West Point." Haig understood. On December 6, 1971, the Pentagon wrote to Knowlton. Haig had talked to the president about the crisis at West Point concerning the memorial. The White House asked Knowlton to "terminate" the project immediately. Nixon's Confederate Monument at West Point died. Percy Squire, David Brice, and 100 African American cadets defeated President Richard Nixon.[46]

Black Cadet Activism after the Monument: "The Concert For the Blood"


MAY 20, 1972

★ ARMED FORCES DAY ★

1100 hrs

Dedication of Eisenhower Hall

TROPHY POINT

Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower • Gen. Wm. C. Westmoreland

1215 hrs

Brigade Review

THE PLAIN

The Corps of Cadets

1400 hrs

Sickle Cell Benefit Concert

MICHIE STADIUM

The Supremes • Ike and Tina Turner Revue • Stevie Wonder

proceeds to Howard University Center for Sickle Cell Research

SPONSORED BY THE CORPS OF CADETS

Newspaper announcement for the Sickle Cell Anemia Benefit Concert: "The Concert for the Blood" featured Soul Royalty – the Supremes and Stevie Wonder. While the Ike and Tina Turner Revue were scheduled to perform, the group canceled at the last minute

Victory on all fronts created new opportunities for black cadet activism. Cadets searched for ways to use their newfound power to help all African Americans. Imbued with leadership and a sense of mission, they strove to show those outside the gates that they were not the instruments of white repression. Like many Black Power advocates, cadets asserted their history, heritage, and culture, but doing so within the confines of a military environment remained difficult. The defeat of the Confederate Monument proposal created momentum to say in public what they had discussed in private. What does it mean to be a black man in a white institution? As Peter Bailey wrote in *Ebony*, "They have not been left untouched by the rising tide of black consciousness." The cadets felt their outsider status not only at West Point but within the black community as well. One cadet said, "Our isolation from the black community makes me feel like a stranded sheep amongst a pack of wolves." Another felt "stifled as a black person." Yet, if African Americans met together in twos or threes, white cadets would ask them, "Ya'll planning a race riot?" The black cadets looked for a way to show the larger community, outside West Point, that they were no regular cadets. As one said, "First of all, I am a black man. Then I am a cadet and then I may possibly be an officer." This phrase worried the Academy's leadership. Would African American cadets no longer integrate into the larger corps of cadets? Would they refuse to join the army as officers? Rather than protest against further injustice, cadets seized on a novel way of bringing attention to themselves as black men in a white institution.[47]

46 The Nixon Library has no papers or taped conversations related to the decision to terminate the Confederate Monument, except a letter from Kerwin to Knowlton. Walter T. Kerwin, Jr. to William Knowlton, 6 December 1971, USMA. William Knowlton to President, Association of Graduates, 6 January 1972, "Possible Civil War Memorial," USMA.

47 Bailey, "Getting It Together at 'The Point'," 136–144.

At the time, sickle cell anemia, a scourge of the black community, had captured America's imagination. *The Washington Post* called it "the top attention getting disease of 1971." Famous athletes like boxer Muhammad Ali and baseball player Willie Stargell began fund-raising activities to garner resources for research. Could the cadets create a fund-raising event to benefit all African Americans? Squire went to General Knowlton and asked, "Sir, sickle cell anemia is something which hits blacks. We would like to have a big rock concert at West Point for the benefit of sickle cell anemia." Knowlton approved, despite misgivings by his staff.[48]

The cadets started to plan a soul concert, making a long list of the acts they would like to see. With the help of a prominent African American attorney in Poughkeepsie, cadets found the right phone numbers and called 200 agents and acts. The cold calls worked. Incredibly, they soon had commitments from the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, and the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. The Supremes and Stevie Wonder agreed to play for just their expenses; the Supremes never even billed the cadets for that. Ike and Tina Turner demanded $10,000, but they cancelled at the last minute. The cadets had several meetings with Aretha Franklin's brother, but he would not waive the singer's $20,000 fee. One cadet commented to Knowlton that after several meetings with Franklin's team, "I've learned the black bond is strong, but that green bond is stronger." The cadet then rubbed his fingers together—the universal sign for money.[49]

A concert of this size required a commitment from the Academy and the army. Cadets visited Capitol Hill and met with Senator Edmund Brooke from Massachusetts, the first African American elected Senator in the twentieth century. Brooke was also a combat veteran of the segregated 366th Infantry Regiment and had seen combat in Italy during World War II. After discussing issues that affected cadets, Brooke gave his full support for the concert. Squire and Brice then visited the Pentagon and talked to the army's general counsel. The Pentagon first denied the cadets' request to host a concert because Department of Defense regulations prevented fund-raising activities on military installations. When the first denial came through, the newly promoted Lieutenant General Knowlton went back to senior leaders in the Pentagon and forcefully argued that the Academy needed the concert. The cadets would see the denial as one more refusal of a white institution to understand the needs of black cadets. Knowlton convinced his superiors in the Department of Defense to grant a waiver, which explicitly stated that the one-time approval was primarily to promote "racial understanding." The fund-raising aspect was incidental to the larger purpose. Only two months before execution, the concert was on. [50]

48 "Athletes: Group Sponsors Sickle Cell Anemia Tests," *Washington Post*, 18 August 1971, 14. Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 632.

49 Samuel Collins, "Meeting with black cadets and officers on the Sickle Cell Anemia Benefit," 17 March 1972, USMA. Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 633. See Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

50 Knowlton to HQDA, 27 January 1972. Winant Sidle to Knowlton, 2 February 1972. John R. Jeter to Knowlton, 23 March 1972, AG Files, USMA. "Cadet Activities Office After Action Report," Sickle Cell Anemia Concert, 12 June 1972, AG Files, USMA.

The example of Monterey, Altamont, Woodstock and other rock concerts that attracted hundreds of thousands of young people, and occasionally violence, worried a few senior leaders, but they cleared every bureaucratic hurdle to make the concert a reality. Back at West Point, the superintendent put the full resources of the military to work. Knowlton assigned one of the senior African American officers on post, Major Melvin Bowdan, as director to run the event, and told Captain Frank Slaughter to assist him. Both officers stopped working on all other projects to concentrate on the concert. While cadets had passion, intellect, and brawn, they lacked the staff skills to organize such a large event. Moreover, they had classes to attend. Every part of West Point pitched in now that the concert had the command's blessing. Among the army's great strengths is its ability to plan. With only two months between Pentagon approval and the concert, military police, lawyers, engineers, audiovisual experts, the athletic department, treasurer, cadet activities director, and the band all planned furiously. Under the poorly chosen acronym SCAB (Sickle Cell Anemia Benefit), the entire community pivoted and worked on the concert above any other task to ensure the event was a success.[51]

The cadets formed a committee headed by Percy Squire, with David Brice as his deputy. They received permission to miss class and intramural athletic activities to promote the show on radio and at other colleges in the area. The Academy worried that despite the big names performing for only their travel expenses, the outlay of money for such a complex event could be greater than the proceeds. Once the army approved the concert, the cadets worked zealously to promote it. Afterward, the Academy recognized that the reason the concert wound up making money was because of the "sales promotion efforts of the cadets."[52]

While the Academy and the army worked feverishly to prepare the venue and post for the concert, the local town outside West Point's gate panicked. Even though Highland Falls had 35,000 football fans moving through its downtown on several weekends each fall, the idea of African American young people scared them thoroughly. The mayor, town supervisor, and police chief were "very concerned" that the "rock concert" would pose serious "repercussions" for their small town, and they asked West Point for help. The leaders at the Academy, however, had already analyzed the potential problems, contacting the New York State Police about their work at Woodstock. After hearing from the state troopers, West Point's leaders concluded that compared to a rock concert, soul music concerts had been free of violence and drug-related incidents.[53]

"The Concert for the Blood" occurred on May 20, 1972, a week shy of a year from the date Nixon first mentioned the Confederate Monument. Squire, as the cadet in charge, sold the first ticket (priced at five dollars) to Knowlton. African American cadets, who

51 Letter Orders 422, "Staff to assist the Sickle Cell Anemia Benefit," 5 April 1972, AG Files, USMA.

52 "CAO After Action Report," 12 June 1972, AG Records, USMA.

53 Arthur J. Yagel, Jr., Town of Highlands Supervisor to Colonel Patrick Dionne, Chief Information Officer West Point, 5 May 1972, AG Records, USMA.

earlier in 1971 had tried and failed to have a soul-themed dance, planned and executed an outdoor, Woodstock-like concert that featured soul royalty—Stevie Wonder and the Supremes backed by seventeen members of the West Point band.[54]

The media predicted 50,000 people for the concert in West Point's football stadium. A deluge that day (in fact, the most rain ever recorded on a May 20) kept the total to about 10,000. Despite the rain and mud, The Concert for the Blood was a thunderous success. For the first time, African Americans from the surrounding area—Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, and Middletown—attended an event at West Point. An African American woman who had worked at West Point for eleven years commented to the superintendent that the concert was the first time she had ever felt part of the community. One white officer called the concert "the first socially conscious event ever held at the Academy." The actor and activist Ossie Davis, who also attended, called the concert "the miracle at West Point."[55]

Pointer View

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

April 28, 1972 WEST POINT, NEW YORK Volume 29, Number 17

LTG William A. Knowlton, Superintendent, purchases the first two tickets to the Sickle Cell Anemia Concert from Cadet Percy Squire last Friday. The concert is slated for May 20.
(Photo by Mr. Palazzo)

The newly promoted Lieutenant General Knowlton purchases the first concert ticket from Cadet Squire for $5. The benefit concert raised over $30,000 for Sickle Cell Anemia Research. The actor and activist Ossie Davis called the concert, "The Miracle at West Point"

Knowlton clearly understood that the concert had changed West Point. He wrote to several prominent friends of the Academy, confiding that the event had given African American cadets a real sense of pride. Furthermore, Knowlton bragged that several members of the media presented the Academy as "being in front on racial understanding and cooperation." Six months earlier, Knowlton faced mutiny. Had the manifesto become public, Knowlton's career would have been over. Instead, he was now a lieutenant general, and in 1976 the army promoted him to four-star general. West Point, Knowlton asserted, would now lead the army in promoting black identity. However, Knowlton did not take all the credit. Many officers at the Academy helped channel the cadets' passion toward making the institution more progressive, not embarrassing it. In a letter to Bowdan, who led the

54 Picture, *The Pointer View*, 20 April 1972, 1. Interview, David Brice, 27 July 2012. "Operations Order Sickle Cell Anemia Concert," 3 May 1972, AG Files, USMA.

55 The football field suffered extensive damage but the superintendent decided to take the money from his budget rather than take money raised by the cadets. "Town Braces for Saturday, Crowds Could Reach 50,000," *News of the Highlands*, Highland Falls, New York, 18 May 1972, 1. "Raindrops Dampened Saturday's Busy Schedule," *News of the Highlands*, 25 May 1972, 1. George Basler, "Downpour Dampens USMA Festivities," *Newburgh Evening News*, 20 May 1972, 1. "CAO AAR," 12 June 1972. Mrs. Floyd H. McAfee to Knowlton, 29 May 1972. Knowlton to McAfee, 2 June 1972. Sickle Cell Anemia Benefit Concert, AG Files, USMA. U'Ren, *Ivory Fortress*, 119. William Knowlton to Richard W. Darrow, 28 June 1972, USMA.

concert planning effort, and Robert Moore, a white officer in the English Department, Knowlton praised both for "helping to diffuse black cadet anger."[56]

In June, cadets travelled to Washington, D.C., to visit Howard University (named after Oliver O. Howard, a West Point graduate and former Academy superintendent) and present its Center for Sickle Cell Anemia Research at Freedman's Hospital with the first check from the concert's proceeds. Money continued to pour in from many sources, including American schools and military units in Germany. By the final tally, the cadets had raised $31,000 for sickle cell anemia research, the largest single donation in the history of the center.[57]

Black Cadet Activism after the Concert, 1972–1976

When Percy Squire and David Brice graduated in June 1972, they had ample reason for pride. Together, they had led the effort to defeat the Confederate Monument and started several initiatives that made life better for all African Americans at West Point. Over the next year, cadets increased their activism to create a black cadet identity that had been missing prior to 1971. The evidence was visible all over campus. In the fall of 1972, for the first time, an African American woman—with an Angela Davis-style Afro—was voted homecoming queen. To bring more black women to West Point, the Academy hired an African American hostess, Etta McAfee, who ensured cadets had a robust social calendar.[58]

Cadet activism continued to forge a black identity. The most important event of the year was Black History Week. In February 1973, West Point's officials trumpeted the "most extensive" event ever. Much more than a history lesson, Black History Week was a celebration of black culture. Fashion, music, history, politics, and outreach all came together as the Academy sought to portray itself as a promoter of black identity. Knowlton tried to explain the change to bewildered alumni who saw black identity as a threat to the Long Gray Line's supposed egalitarian virtues. Knowlton compared African American pride to Polish or Italian heritage. While that explanation seems facile, overlooking the long history of prejudice against African Americans at the Academy, it was an attempt to explain to a conservative white alumni base that change was afoot.[59]

Promoting black identity was part of the change. Starting in 1973, West Point's leadership created a race relations and equal opportunity staff and mandated twelve hours of race relations classes for cadets and sixteen hours for officers and staff. The head of the new office hoped that by the time a cadet graduated, he would receive more than eighty hours of race relations training, equivalent to a two-credit-hour course. The goal

56 William Knowlton to Richard W. Darrow, 28 June 1972, USMA. William Knowlton to Robert Moore, 22 May 1974, author's copy.

57 "Aid for Sickle Cell Study," *New York Times*, 3 June 1972, 59. CAO AAR, 12 June 1972. Captain Frank Slaughter to Mrs. Carolyn James, Bad Neuheim American School, 20 October 1972, AG Files, USMA.

58 *Howitzer*, 1972, USMA. Knowlton, Oral History Interview, 619.

59 "Letter from the President of the Association," *Assembly Magazine*, (Summer 1972). Press Release, United States Military Academy, February 1973, USMA.

of the training, which included lectures and directed discussions led by race relations professionals, was aspirational—to achieve racial harmony. The pace of change at such a conservative institution staggered the mind. In one short year, the experience of African American cadets at West Point had been transformed.[60]

The Behavioral Science Club in the 1972 *Howitzer*. The club provided African American cadets with an important venue to further black identity at West Point. Throughout the 1970s, the Behavioral Science Club and the Contemporary Affairs Seminar sponsored Black History Week, a celebration of African American culture

The idea of African American identity became stronger throughout the 1970s, with both black cadet activism and the Academy's leadership providing opportunities for exploration of what it meant to be Black in the Long Gray Line. The Contemporary Affairs Seminar held a "Loss of Identity" colloquium in 1974 that focused on how to remain an African American man in uniform. Cadet Michael L. Smith wrote a paper for other cadets in 1975 in which he shared how "black me can make it in 'Whitey's World.'" One cadet remarked that the seminar allowed cadets to "feel as though they are not in this by themselves." While the cadets continued to explore their identity, the Academy created a mutually beneficial relationship with the Urban League of Chicago to recruit African American high school students to attend West Point. In the first year, the program identified eight students who received offers of admission.[61]

60 Race Relations Packet, June 1972, 1973, 1974, USMA. Black Studies Report, September 1971, author's copy. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1973, USMA.

61 Michael L. Smith, "Another Duty," 1975 Black History Week Celebrations, USMA. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1974, USMA. Darryl Dean and Jeanne Lynch, "Black Cadets at West Point," *Eagle and the Swan*, May 1980, 36–37, USMA.

Programs by the Academy continued to focus on racial issues, but black cadet activists also wanted to engage with the broader community outside of West Point's gates. The Concert for the Blood had shown African American cadets that they could make tremendous contributions to the black community despite their relatively small numbers. The prestige of West Point opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed to them. To reach a broader community, they had to first receive permission to leave West Point, no easy task in such a paternalistic institution. With the Academy's help, African American cadets identified projects in Newburgh, Highland Falls, and Poughkeepsie that needed assistance, and they provided both funds and labor through Project Outreach.[62] African American cadets became very aware of their role, both in the West Point community and outside it. As one cadet commented at the 1975 Black History Week celebration:

> Black cadets are always concerned about the effect their decisions will have in enhancing the advancement of the black community…. To act abrasively to the interests of the black community, in this present struggle for equality, is to ignore the duty of every black American—unity of effort to achieve equality of opportunity.[63]

The difference between the cadets who graduated in 1971 and those who graduated in 1972 could hardly present a greater contrast. No graduate had an Afro or any yearbook caption that mentioned his race in 1971. One year later, black activist cadets had large Afros and highlighted their sense of racial identity in their photo captions. Cadet Edgar Anderson was described as "proud and defiant… respect is his due." Cadet Tony Desmond was congratulated for "showing us all that BLACK, gray, and gold are beautiful." Cadet Lloyd Austin would later command all American military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan as a four-star general, but in 1975 his yearbook caption proclaimed "YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK." [64]

By 1976, black cadet activism at West Point was at its apex. The African American cadets who graduated that year paid for an advertisement in the yearbook. The two-page, full-color spread (the only ad from a non-business) featured two photos and two poems. The first page contained a photo of twenty-three African American cadets, all in full dress uniform, exuding strength (and no smiles). The poem above the photo, entitled "Black Is," provided a full-throated declaration of Black Power in a white world. Its last stanza read, "Black is big; Black is small; Let ME inform You that Black is ALL!" The second photo showed the cadets lounging; it copied the relaxed "Old Corps" pose of Henry O. Flipper, the first African American graduate in the nineteenth century. Its accompanying poem described the pain of the slave and Jim Crow experience, and the hope and responsibility

62 Dean and Lynch, "Black Cadets at West Point," 36–37.

63 Smith, "Another Duty," USMA.

64 *Howitzer*, 1971, 1972, 1975.

BLACK IS

Black I am
Black I shall ever be
For Black is much more than
being too cold in winter
And too hot during the
summer.
It is more than partying hard
Talking loud
And sporting a big 'fro . . .

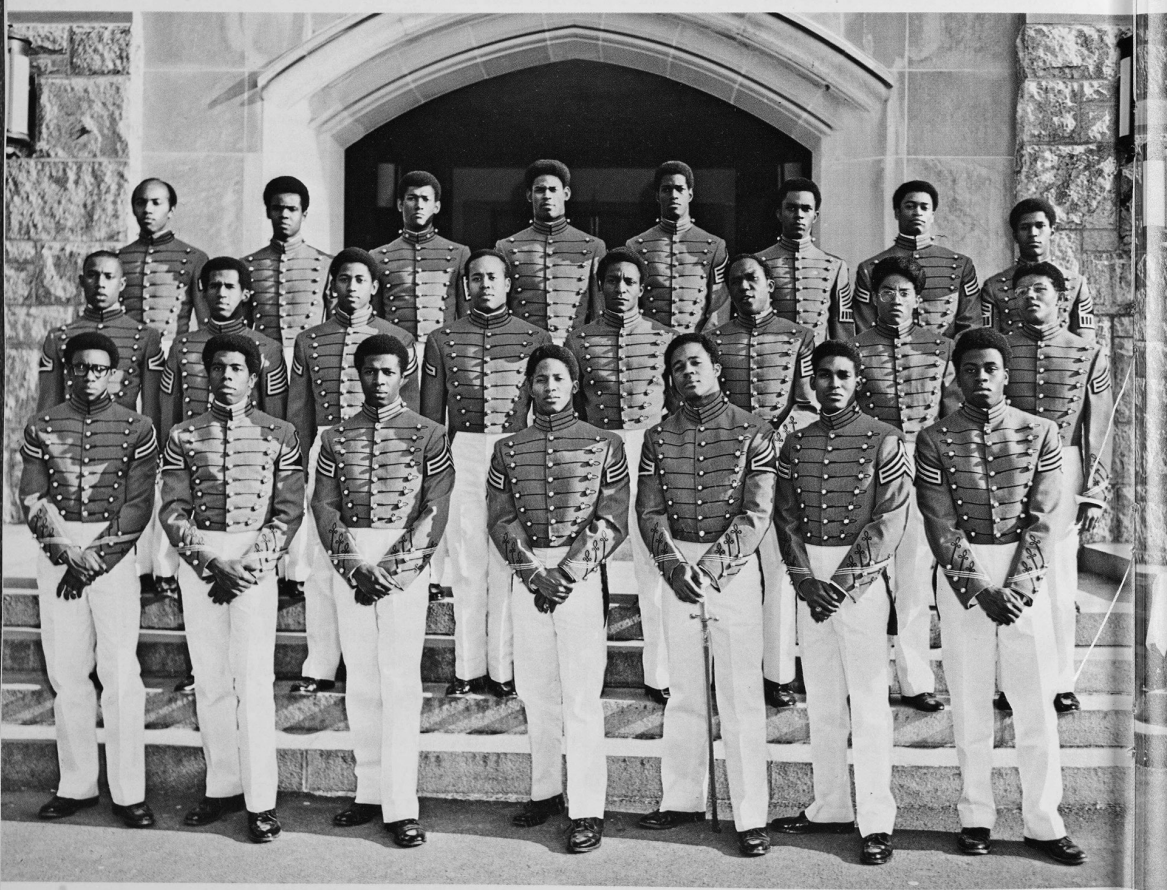
Black is me
Black is you
Black is US — the things that
we do.

Black is time
Black is space
Black is the mother of the
human race.

Black is proud
Black is true
Black is we people who are
darker than blue.

Black is mind
Black is action
Black is the friction that gives
the soul its traction.

Black is big
Black is small
Let ME inform YOU that
Black is ALL!



600

FROM SERVITUDE TO SERVICE

I started here in servitude
but, my mind was free;
You captured my body
but you didn't catch me.

You kept me on plantations,
broke my spirit and my will;
Put my mind on your god
and my body in your field.

With Emancipation you
freed my body
but my mind wasn't set free;
You could free my body
but my mind was left to me.

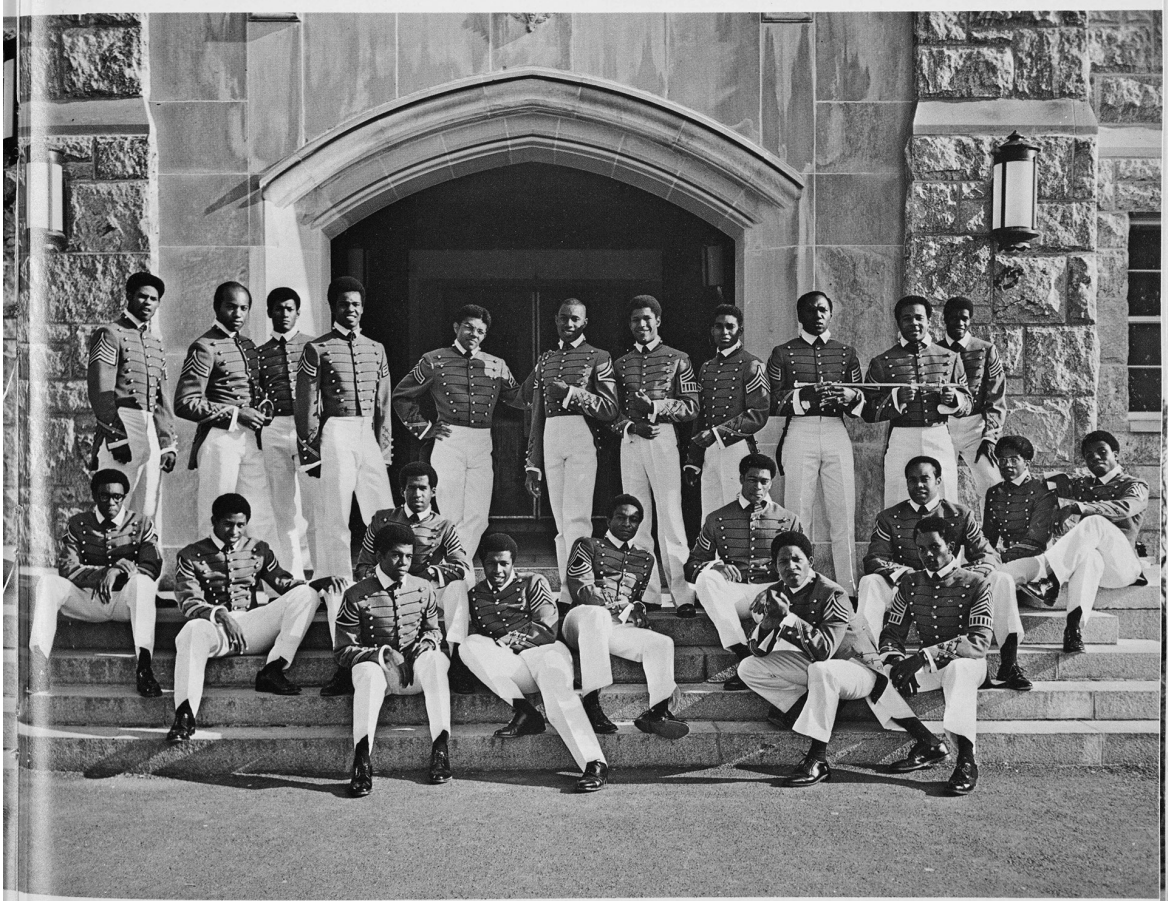
I rode in buses, sat in clubs, fought in
court and sang in church;
But riding, sitting, fighting and singing
still didn't end my search.

I've got to prove to me and I have to
prove to you,
that when I speak of equality
all that I say is true.

You seem to be coming around,
but we've quite a ways to go;
Though progress began quickly,
its pace has gotten slow.

Though no longer in servitude,
I am not yet free,
But I am a bit closer now,
to what I ought to be.

Once I was denied everything,
but now I'm getting what
all men deserve;
Once I was held in servitude,
but it is now my <u>right</u> to serve.



601

The two-page paid advertisement that appeared in the 1976 *Howitzer*

that the cadets felt representing all African Americans as they went into the army. It ended with this stanza:

> Once I was denied everything, but now I'm getting what all men deserve;
> Once I was held in servitude, but now it is my right to serve.[65]

Conclusion

Black cadet activists forged a very public racial identity and forced West Point to promote it. Some black student activists across the country achieved more, especially by helping to create Black Studies programs.[66] Yet, black cadets achieved real progress despite challenging the president from within the military system, which features laws and regulations to prevent political protest. Uniformed personnel do not have the same free speech rights as other Americans.[67]

The cadets accomplished something extraordinary. How were they able to affect change so rapidly? Nixon's monument proposal provided the spark and black cadet leadership made the difference. Percy Squire, David Brice, and the seniors in the class of 1972 knew how to lead. Well-organized, with a clear strategy, firm goals, and unity, the African American cadets were a formidable force. The support and counsel of Captain Arthur Hester and almost all of the black officers meant that the entire African American community of West Point demanded action and change.

How did this story stay out of the press at the time? Black activist cadets and officers did not want to shutter West Point. They believed in the importance of having African American officers in the army's elite. They wanted to save the institution, not ruin it. Furthermore, some credit must go to General Knowlton. The superintendent understood immediately that Nixon wanted to use West Point for his own partisan political purposes. Knowlton talked to Squire often in the fall of 1971 to gauge cadet feelings. When presented with a unified body of African American cadets and faculty, the superintendent quickly acquiesced to cadet demands, rather than escalate the situation. Then with the Concert for the Blood, Knowlton realized he could lead the army toward greater racial understanding, helping the Academy and his own career. The superintendent also finessed white hostility to African American identity. Many white officers and alumni believed that there was no white or black, only army green. Knowlton convinced them otherwise.

Black activist cadets used President Nixon's cynical political ploy at West Point to their advantage. While they did not end racism there or in the army, they did make a difference. Today, when visitors to West Point step on to Trophy Point, they see the

65 "From Servitude to Service," *Howitzer*, 1976, Capitalization in the original text, USMA.

66 In the past ten years, many scholars have looked at Black Student Activism at a variety of colleges. For an overview see Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, and Fenderson, "When the Revolution Comes."

67 The Uniform Code of Military Justice governs law for those in the military including cadets. The 1939 Hatch Act, Army Regulation 600-20 and USMA Regulation 27-2 all prohibit political protests from all Federal government employees, especially those in uniforms. Those regulations also prohibit political protest on military installations.

colossal Battle Monument. Tour guides and historians explain that it honors the U.S. Army officers and men whose sacrifice "freed a race and welded a nation" during the "War of the Rebellion."[68] They may need to explain why the Civil War is called the "War of the Rebellion." They may need to explain why the war "freed a race and welded a nation." Thanks to Percy Squire, David Brice, and other African American cadets, there is no Confederate Monument to explain.

Postscript

In 2014, Cadet Michael Barlow from Atlanta, Georgia, heard a lecture about Percy Squire, David Brice, and the other African American cadets who did so much to change West Point in the 1970s. Influenced by their passion and success, he started his own movement. Barlow knew that the highest honor at West Point went to those whose names graced the dormitories, or barracks as they are called on the army post. The names of West Point's barracks read like a roster of the U.S. Army's most successful senior commanders, including Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Winfield Scott, and surprisingly, Robert E. Lee. Lee never served as a general in the U.S. Army.

Barlow knew that Lee resigned from the U.S. Army after more than thirty years of service, fought against his country for the worst possible reason—to create a slave republic. Lee committed treason for slavery. Naming a barracks after him, one where many African Americans lived, dismayed Barlow. However, changing the name of Lee Barracks would require approval at the highest level of government, no sure thing. However, a new barracks was under construction in 2014, the first in nearly a half-century. Barlow thought that he might be able to influence the Military Academy to name this new barracks after someone who represented the diversity of the West Point experience.

Barlow convened most of the African American cadets during two rowdy sessions to discuss his plan for Operation Tuskegee. Barlow asked the cadets to sign a petition he wrote demanding that West Point name its newest dormitory after Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the first black graduate of West Point in the twentieth century. Davis had undergone a tortuous experience from 1932 to 1936. Because of his race, Davis's fellow cadets silenced him. No one would talk to him, sit with him, or room with him during his four years at West Point. Davis graduated because of his iron will and keen intellect. After his commissioning the army refused to allow him to fly because that would place him in command of white officers. During World War II that racist constraint lifted, and Davis commanded the segregated Tuskegee Airmen, known as the Red Tails. He retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant general, but late in life President Bill Clinton promoted him to four-star general. Barlow

68 Charles Larned, "The Battle Monument at West Point," *Harper's Weekly*, 12 June 1897, 594. James Tyrus Seidule, " 'Treason is Treason': Civil War Memory at West Point," *Journal of Military History* 76 (Winter 2012), 427–452.

started Operation Tuskegee to force the Military Academy to name its new barracks after its most distinguished African American graduate—Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.[69]

Barlow and his fellow cadets modelled their efforts and the petition after the manifesto written by Percy Squire in 1971. As Barlow said, "I felt as though I owed it to people like Percy Squire. If we failed at Operation Tuskegee, we'd be failing them." After Barlow's impassioned talk to his fellow cadets of color, Barlow asked an instructor to tell the assembled cadets about the history of African Americans at West Point, especially the Black Power cadets in the 1970s. After the meeting, eighty percent of cadets of color signed the petition. The other twenty percent refused to sign it because they wanted to allow any cadet to sign the petition.[70]

Barlow had read the manifesto and the tone of his petition echoed Squire's 1971 document. The problem, Barlow wrote, was the "malevolence of a few" and the "negligence of others…. We are relegated to the margins of cadetship and officership." Barlow and many other black cadets had "experienced instances of subjugation" while at West Point. Yet, despite prejudice, Barlow felt "optimistic about the future" because he and his classmates were willing to continue the struggle. [71]

Barlow brought the signed petition to Lieutenant General Robert Caslen, the Academy's superintendent. Caslen had worked successfully to increase the number of underrepresented minorities and he readily agreed to Barlow's proposal. In the fall of 2017, Caslen and assorted dignitaries dedicated Davis Barracks, a $183-million, state-of-the-art barracks. Above the transom, the word "Davis" with four stars greets every one of the 650 cadets who lives there. Nearly fifty years later, Black Power cadets still influence West Point.

Brigadier General (Retired) Ty Seidule is Professor Emeritus and former Head of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

69 Benjamin O. Davis Jr, *American: An Autobiography* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2000), 1–32.

70 Memorandum to USMA Barracks Naming Committee from Cadet Michael Barlow, Subject: Operation Tuskegee, 21 May 2014. Author's files. The author attended both sessions and delivered a talk on African American history, including the fight over Nixon's Confederate Memorial and the role Percy Squire and David Brice played in stopping the monument.

71 Barlow discussion with author, 5 July 2019.