

DyNAMC

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



Is the Military a Model for a Diverse Society?

*Our feature subjects and round table participants are always selected for the qualities, professionalism, and drive we feel makes them **DyNAMC** Leaders for a Changing World. **DyNAMC** features a series of round table discussions on a broad range of topics from a variety of industry leaders across the country. The objective of the discussions is to provide viable solutions to issues that impact diversity issues. The information and views discussed in the round tables are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of **DyNAMC**.*



Major Gary Richardson - Moderator

Served in the Air Force for four and a half years before leaving active duty and joining the Air National Guard in 1993. During his active duty career, he was stationed at Griffiss AFB, NY and was assigned to the Civil Engineering Squadron as a welder. Major Richardson has a combined 26 years of military experience and has been an adjunct instructor at DEOMI since 2005. He is also a 20 year veteran of the New York State Police where he served as the Equal Employment Opportunity Compliance Officer and held the rank of Lieutenant. Major Richardson is a member of the National Diversity Council, Former Diversity Chair Member for CNY SHRM, and is the Founder and CEO of his own Diversity Consulting Firm.

In the 1970s, the issue of pregnancy during service was cause for being mustered out.

Even being promoted above Lieutenant Colonel was unheard of- so in many ways, significant strides in some areas have been made, given the fact that women have recently graduated from elite combat training schools, now fly combat jets, and are four star generals given significant commands.

Similarly, in the LGBT realm, the fact that gays can openly serve with pride and honor has somewhat transformed the culture of the military.

People of color have found opportunity and high level careers in the military which have translated, for some but not all, into good careers and entrepreneurial opportunities in civilian life.

Is Today's Military the Blueprint for a Diverse Society?

Moderator: Major Gary Richardson

Participants: Veteran John Cruzat, LCDR Leedjia Svec, Sgt. Jasmine Jacobs, and SSG Kiaveth Vasquez

John Cruzat

John is a twenty-year Army veteran and currently serves as Principle Partner @ EPIC.

He is a seasoned leader with a proven track record of building, designing and developing teams, processes and procedures in corporate and community based organizations.

EPIC Associates is a full service Green Technology and Human Capital Consulting firm. EPIC is committed to providing efficiency and sustainability solutions in both verticals. On the human capital side of the business, EPIC has provided clients with full scale workforce analysis in performance management, talent development, talent acquisition and diversity & inclusion global strategies. On the green technology side of the business, EPIC provides turn-key solutions from lighting and energy efficiency audits (Level I and customized Level II ASHRAE audits) to holistic, energy generating micro-grid strategies including but not limited to solar, wind and waste solutions.

EPIC's clients include Gulfstream Aerospace, A&E Television Networks, Potbelly Sandwich Works and Fire Department Municipalities, to name a few. The scope of projects range from full scale employee focus groups and engagement data collection (human capital) as well as full scale efficiency and energy generating solutions (green tech).

John developed and lead a national diversity select camp for diverse swimmers in order to build a pipeline for Olympic competition, represented the National Governing Body both Nationally and Internationally on local/national radio, Today Show, ESPN, CNN and print media (USA Today, Wall Street Journal, NY Times, Chicago Tribune, and numerous local Newspapers and Periodicals across the country).

John holds a BS in Resource Management from Troy State University and is completing an MBA.

Moderator: Hello, my name is Gary Richardson, and I am the moderator for this roundtable discussion about emerging issues in the United States military. In the military, people have opportunities in high level careers, some of which have translated into pathways to very good careers upon exiting the military. In recent years, the military has made great strides in the areas of diversity and inclusion. We wanted input from those who have served to see if there is anything that resonates with them in this area. We also wanted to know what are the positives they've witnessed and whether there anything we could be doing better. Before we start, however, can I have each of our panelists to introduce themselves and give us a little bit of their background?

Jasmine: Of course. My name is Jasmine Jacobs and I am a veteran of the United States Army. I was in the military for seven-and-a-half years as a Public Affairs Officer. I served a year in Iraq as a Public Affairs Non-commissioned Officer in Charge, and then I worked at the brigade level for much of my career.

Moderator: Okay. Fantastic. Next, we have John Cruzat. John, could you also give us an intro and give us a little background on your military career?

John: Yes. I enlisted in the United States Army in 1981, right out of high school and served for twenty years plus. I retired in 2002 as a Sergeant First Class.

Sgt. Jasmine Jacobs

Atlanta native and seven-year veteran of the Army National Guard. While in the armed forces, she served as a Public Affairs Specialist and deployed to Baghdad, Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Prior to her honorable discharge from the military, Jasmine spearheaded a media campaign targeted at military hair regulations that unfairly targeted female service members with natural hair- eventually getting those regulations overturned. Following her military career, Jasmine took to the world of social media and advertising, where her creativity and analytical thinking helps to shape content and engagement strategy. She currently works as a Senior Community Manager at SCOUT Marketing where she works on B2B, Consumer, and Pharmaceutical clients. When disconnected from social media, Jasmine can be found spending time with her dog, Bella and catching up on the latest Shonda Rhimes project. Her next mission is to help to facilitate social change through community activism.

Moderator: Excellent. Leedjia Svec, can you give us a little bit about your background in the military?

Leedjia: Certainly. I actually started as an intern under one of the military's STEM summer outreach programs. I don't think anyone saw me doing this at that time, including myself. But, I had a great experience and the group I worked with was diverse in many different ways. I loved that feeling and knew I wanted to be a part of that and wanted continue to facilitate those great things we all did in STEM at that time. That is what led me to a commission within the military serving as a scientist in the medical aspect. I'm still doing that today.

Moderator: Thank you. Kiaveth, could

you please introduce yourself and give us a little background about your military career?

Kiaveth: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Staff Sergeant Vasquez, Kiaveth. I enlisted in 2006 with a military occupational specialty [MOS] of 89th Bravo Ammunitions Specialist. I was active duty for nine years and deployed twice to Iraq, the first time for fifteen months, the

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Leedjia Svec

LDCR Leedjia serves as Director of Military Programs for NASA/Navy. As liaison officer between the Navy and NASA, the Department of Defense (DoD), and other entities, Leedjia is responsible for connecting collaborations and facilitating win-win technology knowledge and resource sharing. She is also Senior Scientist and Director of Basic and Applied Research for the Defense Equal Opportunity Institute (DEOMI).

second for twelve months. I ended my term of service [ETS] and joined the reserves where I'm still an Ammunitions Specialist.

Moderator: Thank you. Now, what I would like to first ask the panel is, from your experience, do you think today's military is a blueprint for a diverse society? Why don't we start with Jasmine Jacobs. Jasmine, what do you think about that question?

Jasmine: I definitely think the military has the capacity to be the blueprint for a diverse society. I think the military is in a unique position to almost be a self-sufficient organization. The military has its own judicial system and its own police force. There are definitely opportunities to show America how we can all work together.

Moderator: Thank you. John Cruzat, I want to come to you next as you are a veteran of the U.S. military. Do you think today's military is a blueprint for a diverse society?

John: I absolutely do. I served from 1981 to 2002, and during that time we were experiencing some growing pains. By the time I retired, however, I recognized a significant change in the leadership structure and diversity

at the highest levels in the military. I was very happy with what I saw by the time I left. Now, I can happily say that the military, in general, is the blueprint of a diverse society.

Moderator: Great. Leedjia Svec, I've had the opportunity to work with you over the years and I'd like to get your take on what you think about this question.

Leedjia: I think the military is definitely a great example of diversity and inclusion. Historically, it has been a leader as an entity in our country. The military can continue to be that model of how to best incorporate, provide tools and research, and enable society to do the most it can as a result of having everyone involved. I think that what has made it successful is diversity.

Moderator: Great. Last, but not least, we have Kiaveth Vasquez. Kiaveth, I'd like to pose the same question to you. Do you think today's military is the blueprint for a diverse society, and if so, how do you think that is?

Kiaveth: I do think that it's a blueprint for our society being that the government has opened positions for females to go into combat. This was something that was not done before so



Staff Sergeant Vasquez

Staff Sergeant Vasquez is a military spouse and mother who enlisted in 2006 with a military occupational specialty [MOS] of 89th Bravo Ammunitions Specialist. She was active duty for nine years and deployed twice to Iraq, the first time for fifteen months, the second for twelve months. She ended her term of service [ETS] and joined the reserves where she remains an Ammunitions Specialist.

it's more equality. It doesn't matter your race, it doesn't matter your religion, it doesn't matter your sex, as long as you have the potential to accomplish the mission and do the job. We have learned, through the military, to respect one another about our religious and political views and still coexist with one another. So, if our society can see that and emulate it, we would not have as many misunderstandings as those that are now occurring in our society. My personal point of view is that I do think the military is a blueprint of diversity for our society.

Moderator: Great. Thank you. I'd just like to expound on this just a little bit. Being a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, myself, I definitely think the military is a blueprint for a diverse society. If you look at the percentage of minorities

within the military ranks as compared to the societal percentages across the board, we're doing spectacularly. For Blacks, we're actually over represented by about two percent in the military as compared to the general population. Hispanics are a little bit lower, but it's getting close. Some of the other minority groups, including women and the Asian group, are a little lower than anyone would like to see, but those things are rapidly changing. A lot has to do with culture and being used to military norms. But, those things are improving every day. I am definitely proud at the strides the military has made in this area. I have another question, still on the topic of diversity. How did diversity play a role in you joining the military? This time, John, we'll start with you.

I am Staff Sergeant Vasquez, Kiaveth. I enlisted in 2006 with a military occupational specialty [MOS] of 89th Bravo Ammunitions Specialist. I was active duty for nine years and deployed twice to Iraq, the first time for fifteen months, the second for twelve months. I ended my term of service [ETS] and joined the reserves where I'm still an Ammunitions Specialist. -Kiaveth

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the case, especially then, and I really appreciated that. This is a great environment to develop and grow and further myself. My male mentor was very encouraging and said, “No, you’re really good. You should think about this path. You could do this.” So, that’s what led me to it. I just really liked the chance to be a part of something bigger.

Moderator: Fantastic. Kiaveth, how about you? How much did diversity play a role in you coming into the military?

John: Well, when I was in high school, we had a wonderful African American recruiter who came to the school and gave an amazing presentation. He was a Sergeant First Class. I hadn’t considered joining the military at that time. At that time, in my neighborhood, which was largely African American, the military was not a career field that was coveted. His presentation drew me into a conversation with him later that day and I realized, at that point, I was not college material; but, the military would not only provide me an opportunity to move forward in my life, but would generate some resources so that I could later attend college if I wanted to, and I did.

Moderator: Great. Leedjia, could you tell us how much diversity played a role in you joining the military?

Leedjia: I think it played a huge role. Like I said earlier, being at the lab and having that experience of being included was important. Even though I was just an intern, I was still valued and I really appreciated that. Certainly, everyone in our group literally sat down at the table to solve some science problems. It was just a great experience. I think a few of the things that really drew me to this path was the fact that women earned the same amount of pay for the same job. That wasn’t often

Kiaveth: To be honest, I’m from Guatemala. With my race and my family women are seen as the stay-at-home mom. You get married, you take care of the kids, and that’s that. I was in Guatemala watching a TV show. I saw the Army commercial. Although it wasn’t in America, they still played the same ad. I saw these soldiers repelling from a helicopter and then I saw females doing some other training. I was only seventeen at the time, but I watched it and was thinking, “Oh, that would be cool if I could get to do that!” I started college and I was like, you know what? Let me try it. I decided to go away from my family’s views and see how it goes. Once I got to basic training, I really understood what I had gotten myself into. I had several drill sergeants. One was a sniper, another was a combat engineer and they were so supportive. They did not care how we looked or who we were. The only thing they cared about was the potential we had.

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That was all they saw in us. They wanted to train us to make sure we were proficient in the basic soldiering skills and that, right there, gave me the motivation to see everybody the same. The only color that actually mattered was green. That’s it. As long as you represented the

green with honor and proudly, you were good to go. That motivated me. Also seeing a lot of diverse races with me was a motivation. I had never seen so many people, living in Central America, and that was very refreshing. My drill sergeant was actually a female and she was short. She was my height. I’m 5’1” and to see her in charge and to see how she had earned the respect of others also played a huge part in not only my military career, but in my personal life.

Moderator: Fantastic. Jasmine, tell us a little bit about how diversity played a role, if any, in you coming into the military.

Jasmine: Diversity definitely played a role when it came time for me to join the military. I actually

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come from a military family and, so, growing up in military communities where different races, different cultures, different backgrounds, are all thriving together and helping one another. Color really isn’t an issue. Gender is not really an issue. It’s something I became used to and something I craved in my adult life, as well. I think that interracial relationships were much more commonplace in the military before they became commonplace in civilian society. So, I’ve grown up having an appreciation for everyone on the same playing field. Knowing that the military gave that to my parents, and gave that to me as a child, I wanted to do the same thing in my adult life.

Moderator: Okay. Good. Now, I have another question for you all on that note. Do you feel



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now, in your position, that you're able to represent the diversity the military is looking for? John, we'll start with you. Do you think you have represented that diversity the military is looking for, now that you've gone through and retired?

John: I do, as a matter of fact. I didn't realize the impact the community I grew up in had on what success looked like, what accomplishment looked like, and what generating respect at work looked like. I had two parents who were professionals, but they worked a lot. I wasn't very connected to what they did outside of the home. When I began my military career, I quickly realized that I did have some useful strengths. As I began to move through the ranks, and generate respect, and as I began to lead people, I generated a whole new level of confidence that enabled me not only to be successful in Signals Intelligence, where I started, but later on in the infantry, leading people into combat. That was kind of a high point for me, and I realized the military created those opportunities and gave me a chance not only to excel, but to be a part of history in a

way that I'd only dreamed about.

Moderator: Thank you. Kiaveth, how do you feel about that? Do you feel that you represent that diversity that the military is looking for?

Kiaveth: Yes. Like I stated before, the only thing that I really cared about were my soldiers and what I saw in my leaders was the color green. Being in the military has taught me that respect is a must. Just because people have different points of view from you, that doesn't mean they're wrong. Just because they don't have the same religion as you does not mean they're wrong or you're right or wrong. Learning to respect one another helped me a lot.

Moderator: Leedjia, I think I asked you this question already, but do you have anything else to add to that particular question about representing the diversity the military is looking for?

Leedjia: I do, thank you. I think there are many forms of diversity, not just outward appearance. For me, personally, I grew up on a sailboat and in a campground. I just have a

“I'm from Guatamala. With my race and my family women are seen as the stay-at-home mom. You get married, you take care of the kids, and that's that. I was in Guatamala watching a TV show. I saw the Army commercial. Although it wasn't in America, they still played the same ad. I saw these soldiers repelling from a helicopter and then I saw females doing some other training. I was only seventeen at the time, but I watched it and was thinking, “Oh, that would be cool if I could get to do that! - Kiaveth”

very different sort of background. Diversity of thought and experience and things of that nature is also a part of diversity. To tap into that and enable, and not force someone to be in a box where they don't fit, is diversity inclusion and that's where you get your best innovation and creativity. I've been very fortunate to serve. I hope to continue to serve and bring those unique things from where I came from and that I've learned to the table.

Moderator: Thank you. The last question that I have for each of you is what do you think the military can do to increase diversity or enhance the diversity that it already has? Leedjia, we'll just start off with you since ended the last one.

Leedjia: I'm going to be biased, because I'm a scientist, and say science! [Laughs] That's my preference. Having done some of the research in science, I do think there is a lot to continue developing in that regard, as well as fairly new fields, like social perception, to tap into. Social physics and things like that are areas we could utilize to create tools and better ways for people, who may not have that background or experience, to improve. It could also help

people who do have that to continue helping others. It may be my hope, but I suspect the future will eventually be in a number of things in that area.

Moderator: Okay. Great. Jasmine, I'm going to ask you the same question. What do you think the military can do to increase or enhance its diversity?

Jasmine: I'm actually going to be a little biased, too. In my civilian life I work in social media. While in the military I worked in public affairs in an area of PR. I think it's really important to make sure that communication is there. Not with those within the military, but using social and different forms of media to have those conversations that might, sometimes, be tough. For example, like we started our conversation today. Talking about how the military can be a blueprint for a diverse society, showing people how we're able to do that, showing people how we're able to work together, to work alongside one another, showing how females are doing roles that once were considered to be male-only roles, and females and males

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being paid the same rate. By telling that story, I think it's key to not only making the military a better organization, but making the world that we fight for every day a better society, as well.

Moderator: Thank you. Kiaveth, what do you think?

Kiaveth: With the experience and the leaders I've had, I feel the military is guiding its new generation down a good path. There were a lot of diverse leaders who were in charge of me with, like I have mentioned before, different religions, races, and sex. It didn't matter, as long as you were capable of doing the job and you had potential. I feel that, if leadership can pass on that knowledge to the new young generation that is now coming into the military, that will help to extend diversity. You earn respect at home. Some of these new soldiers are coming in with a perception that they are an individual, but that does not help our military. If we could continue to groom not only the soldiers and their skills, but also pay attention to how diverse our military is, and how we really don't focus on personal beliefs, but on potential, then that can help our military expand its diversity.

Moderator: Okay. Great. John, last but not least, what do you think the military can do to enhance or increase its diversity?

John: I've been away from the culture for over

a decade now. One of the things we talked about just prior to my retirement was coming up with creative ways the military could be more engaged as a way to be a model for the rest of us. We're struggling out here. We're still having some of the same old conversations and, as the model of diversity and inclusion, I think the military institution would do well to do a little more community engagement, maybe some data collection, and share some of the lessons learned with our corporate partners, education, and non-profits to help everybody move forward and learn some of the lessons the military has already learned.

Moderator: Okay. That's a great segue into the last question. Is there any area in which you think the military could improve upon and, if so, is there something that strikes you right now that you think the military could do to improve? Anyone can answer this question and, before doing so, make sure to introduce yourself.

John: I'd like to weigh in on that, real quick. In this age of terror, that is loosely associated with certain religions, we have to buckle down and ensure that we are really espousing the good examples of our diversity. Specifically, as it relates to those segments of our religious populations in the military that are being demonized by a lot of news reports that don't understand the differentiation between some of the mentalist activities we're seeing. The will

“Do you feel now, in your position, that you're able to represent the diversity the military is looking for?”

-Moderator

and the peace loving segments of the military are doing the job with excellence. I think those need to be highlighted, or the public needs to be made aware of the progress that's being made, internally. Social media was mentioned earlier. That would be a great way to amplify the message outward so that the rest of our nation can see what can be done when inclusion and diversity is leveraged the way it is the military.

Moderator: Excellent. Anyone else want to add to that?

Leedjia: This is Leedjia. I agree along the lines of inclusion and social media creating those tools and enabling people to not have just the ingredients, which is very important, but to mix them properly. To use an analogy, I was at West Point and they had the West Point Symphony Orchestra play. They had all the people in the orchestra ready. They were simply told, "Play!" and they did. To be kind, it was, uhm, interesting. The conductor stopped them, saying, "Okay, now I'm going to conduct." They sounded beautiful. It was kind of what inclusion is. You can't have only the ingredients. You have to have the proper orchestration of them. I think, the more we can

enable that, the better off we'll be.

Moderator: Thank you. Jasmine? Did you want to respond to that?

Jasmine: I think everyone made some really good points and I definitely agree. One thing I think the military has started to do, and I would just challenge them to continue to do, is the importance of having diversity in leadership. I think making sure there is an equal representation of all different backgrounds, cultures, genders, races, and points of view when you're in those meetings making those decisions in anything from uniform regulations to the future of the military. Making sure that every voice is represented and heard will help us to continue to grow as a diverse society.

Moderator: Thank you. Kiaveth, did you have anything to add to this?

Kiaveth: Yes. The only thing I would recommend is, since we're so diverse and we are looking to be equal across the board. We don't want anybody to feel left out or to feel that requirements are being lowered for certain people or genders. We need to have the same

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requirements across the board. Speaking of myself, as a female, if I am going to go into a combat MOS, I should be able to meet the same requirements as my counterparts. If we deploy we need to have each other's back. They need to be able to trust me and I need to be able to trust them. I think that trust and respect is something that's gained while you're doing your mission. Having equal standards

across the board will help our military come together and will allow even more diversity.

Moderator: Thank you so much. That concludes our roundtable discussion. I'd like to thank our panelists, Jasmine Jacobs, John Cruzat, Leedjia Svec, and Kiaveth Vasquez. Have a great evening.

