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'The most progressive and forward looking race relations experiment in existence': Race 'Militancy', Whiteness, and DRRI in the Early 1970s

At the end of the 1960s, the United States military was rocked by race-related violence and riots. Growing fears of black 'militancy' eventually compelled the military's largely white leadership to implement policies aimed at ameliorating racial disparities. One of the most significant changes was the establishment of the Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI) and the requirement that all troops partake in race relations education. Largely overlooked in histories of military race relations and rarely viewed in terms of its relationship to the larger landscape of US race relations, DRRI was founded to train the military's race relations educators. Its original curriculum and methodology, during the years 1971-74, represented a radical response to the problems of racism in the military, and central to its framework was a critique of whiteness as a nexus of racialized power. This paper attempts to present a complex understanding of the motivations involved in the founding of DRRI as it historicizes the military's quest to contain race 'militancy' *through* the establishment of DRRI.

Introduction

On the evening of 20 July 1969, the night before they were meant to leave for Rota, Spain, the First Battalion, Sixth Marines, stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, celebrated their last night before deployment. While many US citizens were watching Neil Armstrong take his first step on the moon, around 200 Marines drank and danced at a service club on base. By most accounts, this interracial group of partygoers enjoined in a fairly peaceable event that evening, but just before eleven o'clock a bloodied and 'intensely excited' white Marine barged into the club and pronounced that he had been assaulted by a group of black Marines. Over the next half hour, fifteen white Marines were assaulted, reportedly by groups of black and Puerto Rican Marines who were heard shouting statements such as 'White beasts' and 'Call us niggers now'. Some of the injured Marines were hospitalized, and a week later, white corporal Edward Bankston died from head injuries sustained during an assault.¹

Though rarely fatal, events like Lejeune had become all too common within the military. Indeed, Lejeune was significant for the ways it symbolized military race relations. As historian James Westheider has argued, 'the conditions at Camp Lejeune that led to violence were typical of the racial

¹ House Committee on Armed Forces, 'Inquiry into the Disturbances at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, N.C., on July 20, 1969', 15 Dec. 1969, 91st Congress, 1st Session. James E. Westheider, *Fighting On Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 94-95.

climate that existed throughout the military establishment.² It was in the wake of incidents such as Lejeune that the US Armed Forces implemented policy changes aimed at easing racial tensions. Among these policies was a 1970 Department of Defense directive requiring all military personnel to partake in annual race relations seminars. The most far-reaching of its wave of race-based policies, this directive also called for the establishment of what would be called the Defense Race Relations Institute. Founded the following year at Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, DRRI was charged with training the thousands of instructors needed to carry out race relations seminars at bases across the globe. Military leaders asserted that DRRI would improve communications and stem 'black militancy,' though they, like political leaders, rarely explained what constituted 'black militancy'. Nonetheless, they felt this phenomenon had a great deal to do with the military's race-related problems, including events like Lejeune. Indeed, the charge of 'black militancy' was often used to set the parameters for acceptable (and unacceptable) behaviors and discourse. During its first years, however, from 1971-74, DRRI exhibited little concern with 'black militancy', and in fact its own framework for understanding US race relations seems to have been highly influenced by the thinking of Black Power activists. This essay explores the military's concern with and attempts to contain 'black militancy' during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including its founding of DRRI. It examines DRRI's first years and its focus on whiteness *as well as* blackness during this time, as it argues that the Institute's framework produced both a moment of unanticipated radicalism in military race relations and a different kind of anxiety over race and 'militancy' for military leadership.

While DRRI interested many military researchers during the 1970s and has found some recent attention with military historians, the history of DRRI has rarely been mined for its relationship to the larger landscape of US race relations.³ Moreover, the Institute itself and some recent scholarship simplistically portray DRRI as the triumphant manifestation of a benevolent DoD heeding the concerns of black personnel and the larger civil rights movement.⁴ Isaac Hampton's recent work, for instance, focuses on the Institute's first Director of Research and Evaluation, Richard Hope, who was a civilian scholar and activist at the time he was approached by the military to work at DRRI. While he makes clear that, from its founding, the Institute drew on racial knowledge being produced in the civilian sector, Hampton insists that the DoD's program for race education 'increased the level of

² Westheider, 95.

³ Harry R. Day, 'Race Relations Training in the US Military' in Dan Landis and Richard W. Brislin, eds, *Handbook of Intercultural Training: Volume II, Issues in Training Methodology* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983), 241-89; Richard O. Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military: Toward the Elimination of Discrimination* (New York: Praeger, 1979); Isaac Hampton II, *The Black Officer Corps: A History of Black Military Advancement from Integration through Vietnam* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 122-37.

⁴ DRRI now exists as the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. On the history it presents of itself, see 'DEOMI History' *DEOMI*: <http://www.deomi.org/AboutDEOMI/DEOMIHistory.cfm> [accessed 17 Sep. 2014].

racial and ethnic sophistication of military personnel far ahead of the general civilian population.’⁵ However, I posit that there was a more complex relationship between the racial knowledges circulating within and among the civilian and military sectors. Moreover, by paying attention to the ways in which political and military leaders conceived of ‘black militancy’ as a threat needing to be contained, I challenge the triumphalist narrative and offer a more nuanced understanding the founding of DRRI. I argue that DRRI was expected, at least in part, to help contain ‘black militancy’. Yet, in no small part because of its racial epistemology, which, Hampton rightly points out, was heavily influenced by progressive black freedom activists, DRRI was forced to modify its curriculum. I aim to show that, in order to understand why DRRI itself stood accused of race ‘militancy’ in the mid-1970s – and underwent a secret Pentagon investigation – we must examine a key aspect of its racial framework: its critical understanding of whiteness as a social construction and a nexus of power.

The military’s ‘race problem’: containing black ‘militancy’

In the late 1960s, the military’s race-based problems were widespread, manifold and escalating. An increase in research and reporting by both civilians and military personnel revealed that labor was stratified along racial lines and patterns of institutional racism shaped all enlistees’ experience. Generally speaking, peoples of color were clustered in low-skilled and non-technical positions due to the in-built bias of the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), which placed all recruits on their military career paths and which tended to reflect the knowledge of dominant white culture. As *Ebony* writer David Llorens wrote in 1968, this meant that ‘a black man who hasn’t mastered white culture cannot, for example, learn how to repair machinery’ and excel at this skilled portion of the test.⁶ African Americans were thus under-represented in military leadership (3.9 percent of Army officers were black, though the percentage of African Americans in its ranks more than trebled that figure) and over-represented among combat troops and, consequently, among the US’s Vietnam War dead. The system of draft deferment compounded these problems; eligible African Americans were about twice as likely as their white counterparts to be drafted. In the end, African Americans accounted for

⁵ Hampton, 126-28, 123.

⁶ Quoted in David Llorens, ‘Why Negroes Re-enlist’ *Ebony*, Aug. 1968, 87-88, 90, 92 (90). Peter G. Nordlie and others, *Improving Race Relations in the Army: Handbook for Leaders* (McLean: Human Sciences Research, Inc., 1972), 15, 37-39; Day, 243.

twenty-eight percent of US deaths during the war, though they constituted only thirteen percent of the nation's military personnel in Vietnam.⁷

Off-post discrimination, as well as racist threats and assaults, also shaped military life. According to Desmond King, off-post housing discrimination 'flourished' well past the time it had been curbed on bases in the early 1960s.⁸ Some communities literally displayed racial antagonism, as when a billboard near Fort Bragg, North Carolina, read 'Welcome to Fayetteville, Home of the Ku Klux Klan. Fight Communism and Integration.'⁹ African American journalist and researcher Wallace Terry II reported racist graffiti in latrines on bases across Vietnam, and when Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, he wrote, 'whites burned crosses at Cam Ranh Bay and flew Confederate flags over bases at Danang.'¹⁰ Though racist assaults were not uncommon experiences for black troops, civilian researchers found they were less likely than whites to report such attacks.¹¹

Enlistees of color resisted discriminatory treatment in many ways, but, rather than understanding these actions in light of inequalities and injustice, often military leadership read them as proof of race-based 'militancy'. In his research into African American troops during the Vietnam War era, Westheider found that many black individuals banded together to form a 'black subculture, based on racial pride and solidarity, within the ranks.'¹² As many enlistees began to don slave bracelets, greet each other with daps (ritual handshakes), and even organize groups like Movement for a Democratic Military, military researchers and officials tried to make sense of the 'race problem.' They set their sights on young black service personnel; a wider pattern of distress around 'black militancy' permeated military leadership. They worried about the influence of civilian groups like the Black Panther Party and commissioned military researchers to investigate the extent to which such groups had gained a foothold in the military. Though researchers found little to no evidence to

⁷ Judson L. Jeffries, 'Conclusion: The Fall and Legacy of the Black Power Movement' in Judson L. Jeffries, ed., *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 302; Paul T. Murray, 'Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism' *Journal of Black Studies*, 2(1971), 57-76; Westheider, 21-24.

⁸ Desmond King, *Separate and Unequal: African Americans and the Federal Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140. See also, Nordlie and others, 45.

⁹ Westheider, 68.

¹⁰ Wallace Terry, II, 'Bringing the War Home' *The Black Scholar*, 2, 3 (1970), 6-18 (11).

¹¹ Westheider, 111-13. On the violence and discrimination endured by Asian American, Native American and Latino troops, see Chalsa M. Loo, 'Race-Related PTSD: The Asian American Vietnam Veteran' *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 7, 4 (1994): 637-56; Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas, 1996); Anne Marie Ruef, Brett T. Litz, and William E. Schlenger, 'Hispanic Ethnicity and Risk for Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder' *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 6, 3 (2000), 235-51.

¹² Westheider, 95 (quote), 141-45.

suggest that civilian groups had 'infiltrated' the military, white leadership continued to react with suspicion to the development of black subcultures and displays of racial pride.¹³

The Congressional inquiry into Lejeune exemplifies this dominant understanding of the 'race problem.' Lejeune had prompted the House Subcommittee on Armed Services to set up a Special Subcommittee to Probe Disturbances on Military Bases. Noting that the Lejeune events came 'on the heels of some reports of other disturbances on military bases,' the subcommittee was directed to 'determine the root causes of such conduct, the extent to which such acts have occurred on military installations, and what measures are being taken to stop such behavior.' Reporting five months later, in December 1969, the subcommittee affirmed the existence of racial discrimination towards peoples of color in the Armed Forces and noted that at Lejeune Marines had testified to prejudice on- and off-post while 'seniors placed obstructions in the way of young Marines seeking to deal with the race problem.' The subcommittee's ultimate conclusion, however, failed to connect these issues to the Lejeune 'disturbances':

The serious racial disturbance at Camp Lejeune on July 20 did not result from any specific provocation, but was generated by a few militant blacks who fanned the flames of racism, misconception, suspicions, and frustrations.¹⁴

The subcommittee expressed deep concern over what was troublingly referred to as 'this new breed of black marines.' Younger African Americans entering the military exhibited less patience than earlier generations of black service personnel, wrote the subcommittee, and the military needed to persuade young blacks 'who may well have been exposed to an overdose of militancy prior to enlistment' that they need not harbor any 'mistrust of the "white establishment."' The subcommittee felt that the improvement of communications, particularly along hierarchical lines, would help prevent another Lejeune.¹⁵

In a pattern oft-repeated by Defense and Congressional leadership, the inquiry group framed black 'militancy' as the instigating factor behind racial violence in the military even while it recognized the reality of racial discrimination. Rather than seek to understand the connections between such discrimination and what it understood as black 'militancy,' the latter was viewed simply as an 'import' from the civilian world, something African Americans 'may well have been exposed to...*prior* to enlistment.' The month following the Lejeune inquiry report, the military's highest-ranking race

¹³ See, for instance, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army, *An Assessment of Racial Tension in the Army* (Department of the Army, 1969); 'Newer Negro Marines Are Looking for Identity With Blackness', Special to The New York Times, *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 1969, 44.

¹⁴ 'Inquiry into the Disturbances at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune'.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

relations official, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights L. Howard Bennett, even more clearly held the civilian sector to account for producing unhappy African American service personnel. As a 'result of the turbulence in the cities in the mid-1960s and what city life has done to young men [sic] before they came into the Armed Forces,' he avowed, black service personnel were more likely to express 'their desire for equal treatment.'¹⁶ While racial grievances certainly were not divorced from the larger US social milieu, attaching black 'militancy' to the civilian sector in this way further ensured that the endemic racism of the military itself was obscured. Thus, the military's racial ills were first re-written in terms of black 'militancy' rather than widespread inequalities and discrimination; then, black 'militancy' was viewed as a problem to contain, rather than a phenomenon to understand.

DRRI's radical racial framework

Despite its reticence to accept responsibility for racial discrimination, military leadership began to take the problems of racial discord seriously toward the end of the 1960s, and as Westheider and Richard Hope have indicated, this happened only after rebellions and violence occurred at US military installations around the world. Such violence included events like Lejeune, as well as increased fragging (the killing of a commanding officer by one or more subordinates) in Vietnam. While motivations behind fraggings have been debated, during the war many white officers believed that black subordinates targeted them because of race. For instance, a white lieutenant, Charles Anderson, wrote a letter home in which he blamed 'black trash' for killing two other officers.¹⁷ Motivations aside, this was violence that affected large numbers of white personnel. In other words, threats to the physical safety of whites finally provoked changes to race-based policies in the military; by contrast, troops of color had been experiencing threats and assaults for some time.

By 1970, Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor identified race relations as one of the 'most pressing matters with which the Army is presently concerned.'¹⁸ A number of changes were implemented that aimed at decreasing racial disparities and discord. Post exchanges began to stock 'black oriented personal care products', as well as literature and clothing 'believed to be of particular interest' to black service personnel.¹⁹ The Pentagon also modified some important procedures. To

¹⁶ S&S Washington Bureau, 'Race Relations Instruction to Begin Soon' *Pacific Stars & Stripes* (hereafter, *S&S*), 12 Jan. 1970, 7.

¹⁷ Westheider, 108. See also, Hope, 108-11, 130-31; Natalie Kimbrough, *Equality or Discrimination?: African Americans in the U.S. Military During the Vietnam War* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 10.

¹⁸ Stanley R. Resor, 'Speech by the Secretary of the Army' in Department of the Army, *Race Relations Conference: Fort Monroe, Virginia, 17-20 November* (Fort Monroe: 1970), Inclosure 2, 1.

¹⁹ Department of the Army, *Race Relations Conference*, 9.

rectify racially discriminatory patterns in the military's penal system, for instance, it mandated that non-judicial punishments meted out to the lowest paid service personnel, who were disproportionately peoples of color, be published. The AFQT was adapted, as well, and became the Army Classification Battery, which was supposed to be less culturally biased.²⁰

The most intensive efforts carried out, however, related to race relations education. In 1970, white Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird created the Inter-service Task Force on Education in Race Relations, which called for compulsory race relations education for all military personnel and prompted the founding of DRRI. Though the military had run some race-based educational programs before, as Isaac Hampton has written, the Institute represented 'the most ambitious race relations education program ever put into practice by any United States government entity at the time.'²¹ Indeed, from 1971 until 1974, all military employees had to participate in eighteen hours of race relations training (divided over a few days). Though the Pentagon relied on some outside personnel for this, DRRI trained the vast majority of these seminar leaders, creating the military's cohort of race relations instructors and equal opportunity officers.²² During its first three years in operation – between 1971 and 1973 – DRRI trained more than 2500 personnel.²³

DRRI's founding reflected Defense and political officials' sense that they could both curtail racial tensions and stem the putative tide of 'black militancy' through education and, especially, improvements in communication. The post-Lejeune subcommittee seemed confident that at the root of any 'real or fancied' incidents of racial prejudice in the military was 'a *failure of communications*'; improving (presumably white) commanders' communication with black subordinates could decrease 'black militancy,' they suggested.²⁴ Seven months later, Laird's Inter-service Task Force reported, '[E]very thoughtful study of race relations in our society...stresses accelerated education in race relations and improved communications as the key to solving this problem [i.e. racial tensions].'²⁵ The wider military community also seemed to view DRRI's importance in terms of curbing 'black militancy.' *Stars and Stripes*, the military's independent newspaper, eagerly reported conversion-like

²⁰ Richard Stillman, II, 'Racial Unrest in the Military: The Challenge and the Response' *Public Administration Review*, 34 (1974), 221-229 (222-23); Mickey R. Dansby and Dan Landis, 'Intercultural Training in the United States Military', in Mickey R. Dansby, James B. Stewart, and Schuyler C. Webb, eds., *Managing Diversity in the Military: Research Perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2001), 1-28 (13-17).

²¹ Hampton, *Black Officer Corps*, 123.

²² Day, 'Race Relations Training', 244-46, 255-56. By 1970, all major posts in the US had hosted race relations seminars. Even before the military was officially integrated, 'informal discussion groups' between black and white troops were implemented during the 1940s in order to 'improve relations'. See *Race Relations Conference*, 2; and Hope, 27, 41.

²³ Hope, *Racial Strife*, 44. 'About DEOMI' *DEOMI* (2009) <http://www.deomi.org/AboutDEOMI/AboutDEOMIIndex.cfm> [accessed 10 Aug 2009].

²⁴ 'Inquiry into the Disturbances at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune'. Italics in original.

²⁵ Quoted in Hope, 5.

experiences among the Institute's black participants. It interviewed Army Captain William Oliver who noted, "Some of our class members came with pretty strong black militant ideas, but the course was so effective that their views were channeled more toward the center and they became more rational."²⁶ Bob Stitt, an African American Air Force sergeant, revealed in his interview with the newspaper: "I'd accused white folks of a lot of things because I could only see from the black man's point of view. Then people started asking me, 'What have you done that makes you so great?' It's awfully hard to give an honest answer like, 'next to nothing'."²⁷

DRRI's first leaders and employees, however, understood the Institute's purpose in terms of education, not communications. Representing various ranks, most DRRI students in the early 1970s identified as white or African American. During their time at the Institute, they formed two-person teams that included an officer and an enlisted person, one white and one non-white, and upon leaving DRRI, these teams went on to co-lead race relations seminars at bases around the world.²⁸ Though mostly volunteers, some of the first inductees were assigned by their commanders to the DRRI program, and as Hope has indicated, enrollees often had to fight popular conceptions that commanders 'assigned their incompetents to the race relations program.'²⁹ In reality, these individuals committed themselves to an intensive venture – seven weeks of instruction and living on Patrick Air Force Base for the duration of the training, which entailed constant engagement with their seminar facilitators and other inductees. Reading and small group discussion occupied most of their time. A demanding discussion group method sought to directly challenge participants' prejudices. Such confrontation often resulted in the 'isolation' of the individual, which gave him or her time to consider the 'impact' of their prejudices.³⁰ This method brought little comfort to those who made racist remarks, but it could work to protect the people who were most often hurt by such racist remarks, usually peoples of color. Moreover, even after inductees graduated from the Institute and became race relations instructors, they were expected to continue independent study into the history and ideologies of peoples of color in the US and stay attuned to 'minority strategies' for fighting racism.³¹ Pedagogically, then, DRRI's earliest years proved rigorous and challenging.

Though the curriculum covered procedural aspects related to, for instance, equal opportunity policies, studies largely centered on racism and race relations in the US, and DRRI's understanding

²⁶ Bill Craig, "All Left With Better Feelings," Captain Says' S&S, 9 Feb. 1972, 10.

²⁷ Eric Sharp, 'Race Seminars', S&S, 20 Nov. 1972, 8-9 (8).

²⁸ Jon Nordheimer, 'Curbing of Racial Tensions Is Aim of New Defense Institute' S&S, 14 Mar. 1972, 9.

²⁹ Hope, 45.

³⁰ Hope, 43, 50-51; Day, 246, 254.

³¹ Day, 246-47; Department of the Army, *General Officer Race Relations and Equal Opportunity Orientation and Seminar* (Washington: US Department of the Army, 1973), 167-68.

of the 'race problem' had a surprisingly radical bent, one that emphasized the role of whites in both the ills of racism and the project of racial justice. The Institute's racial framework, the knowledge or understanding of race which it attempted to impart, was grounded in historical and sociological analyses covered in two large blocks of instruction: 'minority studies' and 'behavioral sciences'.³² As part of 'minority studies', DRRI instructors focused on the history of peoples of color in the military and larger national landscape – Chicanos, American Indians, and especially African Americans. The aim here was to instill in attendees a greater 'appreciation of the difficulties facing Black Americans' in both the military and larger society.³³ They studied black participation in the military from the American Revolution to the war in Vietnam and learnt how that involvement – marked as it was by a pattern of white intolerance and black exclusion – 'mirror[ed] the unmistakable tragedy of blacks in [the US].' As the black/white focus eventually expanded to include the study of other non-white groups, participants also examined contemporary ideologies of peoples of color. For instance, they examined the concept of *la raza*, the collective identification of Latino populations based on a shared history of colonization.³⁴ During the 'behavioral sciences' block of instruction, they considered institutional, cultural and individual racism, and they explored the 'psychological, social, and cultural' factors that contribute to interracial tensions.³⁵ In this instructional block, studies deviated from mainstream notions about racism involving overt and usually individual acts of bigotry. Rather, the Institute held that racism was the combination of power (in terms of access to societal institutions and resources) and race prejudice.³⁶

This and other tenets of DRRI's teaching were inspired by advocates of Black Power, and one particular book, written by a white anti-racism consultant out of Detroit, proved crucial in helping the Institute impart this analysis to students. Robert Terry's punchy 1970 book, *For Whites Only*, grew out of anti-racism training events that Terry and his colleagues staged through the Detroit Industrial Mission, a non-profit, Christian-based consultancy that had shifted its focus toward racial justice after the Detroit race rebellion of July 1967. Terry and other DIM staff were pioneers in the development of anti-racism consultations. They developed training curriculum that was targeted at white-collar management within large corporations (i.e. mostly white, middle-class men) and which openly adopted Black Power activists' understanding of race and racism in the US. DIM drew from the work of well-known activists like Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver, their own staffer Douglass Fitch and local advocate Reverend Albert Cleage, as well as black academics such as Lerone Bennett Jr.

³² Day, 253.

³³ Department of the Army, *General Officer Race Relations*, 6; Hope, 50.

³⁴ Quote from Hope, 9. Department of the Army, *General Officer Race Relations*, 22-64; Hope, 56.

³⁵ Hope, 44; Day, 254.

³⁶ Department of the Army, *General Officer Race Relations*, 118.

and Charles Silberman. The influence of these thinkers and activists was seen in the ways in which DIM's trainings – and those of DRRI later – emphasized the roots of racism within white communities, culture and institutions. They began from the assumption that the eradication of racism rested upon the self-determination of peoples of color and the transformation of white-dominated institutions and cultural practices. Terry's book pointedly pitched these ideas to whites, and, I would suggest, it allowed the Institute to espouse Black Power ideals in the early 70s without having to use the work of more controversial figures like Carmichael and Cleaver, though they clearly impacted Terry's ideas. Terry's book, then, provided a back door into Black Power for DRRI. Whereas color-blindness had begun to dominate mainstream discussion of racism in the US, DRRI's ideology in the early 1970s remained more closely aligned with the Black Power turn.³⁷

The emphasis on whiteness *as problematic* was central in this, and here, DRRI's reliance on Terry was great. Echoing Carmichael, *For Whites Only* argued that racism in the US constituted a white problem; whites perpetuated racism and they would have to join with peoples of color in resisting it. In order to do this, Terry posited, whites needed to develop a 'new white consciousness.'³⁸ Neither color-blind stances nor white appropriation of black culture could undo racist patterns and policies. Rather, whites had to recognize their individual and collective responsibility for racism in order for racial equality to be achieved. 'New white consciousness, then,' Terry argued, 'is a way for us to understand ourselves [i.e. whites] simultaneously as white racists and as creators of justice.' Such a consciousness involved a deep understanding of how white-dominated institutions, policies and cultural practices sustained racial disparities, and it compelled whites to engage in racial justice. Policies of non-discrimination would simply not suffice, Terry wrote; they merely represented white passivity. Instead, it was necessary for whites to actively promote policies and values that allowed for self-determination and cultural pluralism.³⁹

Having adopted this analysis, in the early 1970s DRRI stressed that whites in the military had to develop a new consciousness in order to combat racism. It maintained that racism was a problem created and sustained by whites and white-dominated institutions, with the military acting as a microcosm of the larger society. Institutional racism ensured that whites had far greater access to mainstream institutions and resources. Cultural racism also ensured that they could not escape a racially prejudiced upbringing. DRRI students engaged in exercises that demonstrated the racial

³⁷ Robert W. Terry, *For Whites Only* (Detroit: Eerdmans, 1970), 1-21; Say Burgin, *The Workshop As the Work: White Anti-Racism Organising in 1960s, 70s and 80s United States Social Movements* (University of Leeds: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2013), 47-109.

³⁸ Terry, 17.

³⁹ Terry, 17-20.

prejudices hidden in seemingly innocuous cultural mediums (for instance, language) and in doing so learnt that US culture strongly favored whiteness. Whites, thus, had both the *power* and the *prejudice* necessary to maintain racist systems.⁴⁰ White military leaders, in particular, needed to alter their understanding of racism because they served as ‘those in the power structure.’ Recognition from whites that they must ‘accept responsibility’ for racism in the military constituted DRRI’s primary ‘factor for change,’ the most important way in which racism in the military could be confronted.⁴¹

According to DRRI philosophy (via Terry), this ‘new white consciousness’ would spur whites to act in ways that would ‘cause changes in the [military] system.’⁴² Though both Terry and the Institute espoused an understanding of racism as multi-leveled – individual, cultural and institutional – DRRI broke with Terry’s framework, which held that combating cultural racism could end other forms of racism. Instead it stressed challenges to institutional racism:

While cultural racism is very damaging to minorities, there is little opportunity for us [in the military] to affect change in that realm... [However] we can use the knowledge of cultural racism to deal with institutional racism in the [military] to insure we do not perpetuate, through our institutions, standards that exist in the civilian communities of America.⁴³

Thus, understanding cultural racism was important insofar as it might bear itself out in the military’s institutional practices. New consciousness for whites could help whites sympathize with the frustrations expressed by service personnel of color and better understand how discrimination played itself out within the military establishment.

Although the Institute stressed the structured nature of racism in US society, it and its subsidiary schools took care to connect the individual to the institutional. At the opening of the Army’s Oberammergau-based race relations school, which supplemented the work of DRRI graduates in the Army, Major General Harold Hayward discussed the need for the school:

The reason we have [race relations courses] is because equal opportunity for all in USAREUR [US Army Europe] does not exist at this time, nor do we have the kind of attitude toward equal opportunity and human relations approach toward getting along with each other that we should have.⁴⁴

Significantly, Hayward continued by not only linking these structural issues with individuals in the military but by specifically implicating the average white soldier or sailor, not black ‘militants’:

Young white soldiers agree that there are changes that need to be made, but they can’t see a requirement that they should change their attitude nor the military system. The only requirement they

⁴⁰ *General Officer Race Relations*: 118-30; and on exercises in cultural racism, see pages 140-42 in this volume.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 122, 165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁴ ‘Race relations school is launched at Oberammergau’, 9.

think should be made is in the attitude and performance of young black soldiers. This is an unhealthy situation.⁴⁵

Hinting at widespread denunciations of black 'militancy', Hayward forwarded the viewpoint of DRRI – that whites' refusal to understand the connections between their personal views, the 'military system', and the perpetuation of racial inequalities was detrimental to military race relations. Moreover, he implied that such concerns over black 'militancy' in fact worked to eclipse whites' responsibilities in ameliorating the military's race-based problems.

In effect, then, DRRI's leaders and instructors challenged preoccupations with black 'militancy' and posited a radically different understanding of race relations. DRRI's racial framework may not have been new or radical to many personnel of color, many of whom had long pointed to the problem of white personnel who did not see the connections between themselves and racism. As one anonymous 'top-ranking black officer' told *Jet* magazine in 1969, 'The white man thinks the black soldier is the problem. This is not so. The problem lies among whites who do not give blacks equal opportunity or treatment.'⁴⁶ Nonetheless, DRRI understood the parameters of the military's race-based issues – of the country's racial landscape, even – very differently from military leadership. It was indeed a radical departure. Rather than fret over the so-called rise in black militancy, DRRI drew from activists connected to the black freedom movement and, in doing so, shifted away from the predominant white response to Black Power happening in the country, including within the military. At a time marked by white backlash and within an institution famous for its conservatism, DRRI's racial framework was somewhat remarkable. Bob Stitt, an African American technical sergeant in the Air Force who became a race relations instructor through DRR, put it like this to *Stars and Stripes*: 'Face it, the military is a conservative organization. Yet what we have here [DRRI] is the most progressive and forward looking race relations experiment in existence.'⁴⁷

Indeed, whereas the military as a whole reacted anxiously to so-called 'black militancy', DRRI embraced many tenets that were central to Black Power. Among these, and key to understanding why DRRI's framework was so radical (particularly for the military), was its ideas about the 'place' of whites within anti-racism efforts. As an ideology, Black Power challenged dominant racial notions that placed the responsibility for ending racial inequalities onto persons of color, especially African Americans. Instead, as Terry wrote and DRRI instructed, whites needed to appreciate the ways in which political and economic patterns sustained the racial inequalities against which African

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ 'Bias in military stirs top black officers', *Jet*, 4 Sep. 1969, 3.

⁴⁷ Sharp, 'Race Seminars', 8-9.

Americans had been organizing. In other words, the roots of racism lied within white-created systems and not black communities or 'militant' stances. DRRI ensured that the military, as one example of a white-dominated institution, was included in this analysis, and, ultimately, it found military leadership more problematic than black 'militancy'.

Renewed fears, militancy and DRRI

To many, including most DRRI students and many of their base commanders, the Institute's training in the early 1970s made a big impact. Hope's research indicated that participants found the training to be 'highly unique and...personally meaningful', that it had prepared them well for their duties as race relations instructors, and that most post commanders felt that the education that they carried out improved interracial relations at their installations.⁴⁸ These positive changes occurred despite the initial reluctance of many troops to participate in the mandatory race relations training. For instance, Bob Stitt remained at Patrick Air Force base with his training partner, white 1st lieutenant Ken MacDonnell, after both graduated from DRRI. Stitt noted that he and MacDonnell became 'obvious target[s]' for the many individuals who were resistant at first. Yet, people usually came around and participated fully in the seminar, Stitt said, as when a white participant in one of Stitt's November 1972 seminars remarked, 'It's funny, but before I came to these race relations classes I couldn't even have talked about [the idea of interracial marriage]. I wasn't too sure about these seminars at first, but now I think they're a damned good idea.'⁴⁹ Participants at a seminar conducted by DRRI graduates at Rhein-Main Air Force Base in Germany also highlighted the ways in which the training enabled them to think differently, even critically, about racism. One reflected, 'I thought I understood but now I realize I have a long way to go,' while another stated, 'I didn't realize there was as large a problem as there is.'⁵⁰ For other participants, the seminars allowed them to openly voice frustrations. At a seminar held at the Naval Support Activity in Naples, Italy, in late 1972, participants shared stories of enduring racial epithets and debated military leaders' commitment to racial equality. As one black petty officer observed, 'It isn't that the people in authority don't know about racial problems. They don't give a damn. Corrective action has to start at the top. Why aren't the high-ranking people here today?' Led by two DRRI graduates – African American petty officer Rob McKnight and white petty

⁴⁸ Hope, 60-74 (60).

⁴⁹ Sharp, 8-9.

⁵⁰ J. King Cruger, '17 Graduated by Racial Seminar', *S&S*, 24 June 1972, 9.

officer Jim House – seminar participants went on to discuss bigotry within their own ranks and within wider US society.⁵¹

As content as many of the seminar participants and base commanders may have been with the work of DRRI graduates, some commanders complained that DRRI had ‘brainwashed’ personnel and created ‘race militants’.⁵² Many DRRI attendees, particularly white attendees, had indeed experienced such profound personal transformation as a result of their experience in DRRI seminars that they reported problems upon re-entering normal military employment. In their new positions as RR instructors and EO specialists, many felt unsupported by management. ‘If an individual is dedicated to the [Equal Opportunity] program,’ one DRRI graduate lamented, ‘he is going to be frustrated. A lot of the frustration is because you perceive that you are not getting the support that you should be getting.’⁵³ Disquieted commanders interpreted as coercion what many participants experienced as transformation, and they were joined by some civilians who were suspicious of the military’s turn towards race relations education. Senator Sam Ervin, for instance, who had made a name for himself as a civil libertarian and segregationist, sat on the Senate Armed Services Committee and was alarmed by what he felt were ‘official attempts to manipulate people’s minds.’⁵⁴

By the mid-1970s, continuing fears of putative race ‘militancy’ transformed this censure into surveillance. When some base commanders complained that DRRI had created ‘militants’ bent on ‘subvert[ing] the normal activities of the military’, the Pentagon launched surreptitious investigations into DRRI, its own institution.⁵⁵ Even though it eventually decided that DRRI did not aim to be subversive, the Pentagon did believe that DRRI ‘was somewhat overzealous in its initial training methods’ and asked the Institute ‘to modify its approach so that individuals leaving the institute would not appear too militant.’⁵⁶ DRRI faced further criticism in late 1973 when the House Armed Services Committee reported that the military’s race relations trainings ‘may have seriously weakened discipline’ as they sometimes ‘degenerated into rap sessions where the private calls the colonel and general by their first names and proceeds to “chew” them out.’ The committee dropped 700 race relations instructors and equal opportunity managers from the following year’s budget and ordered

⁵¹ Bob Hoyer, ‘Blacks and whites debate tensions’, S&S, 1 Dec. 1972, 9.

⁵² Day, ‘Race Relations Training’, 254.

⁵³ Hope, 86-87.

⁵⁴ Nordheimer, ‘Curbing of racial tensions’, 9.

⁵⁵ Hope, 52.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the closing of all branch-specific race relations schools.⁵⁷ As Hope has argued, in the wake of these events DRRI's radical approach to race relations shifted significantly:

The content of the curriculum changed from a black/white confrontation to one increasingly less direct and more academic in direction...DRRI was ultimately to develop a more conservative approach to the study and training of race relations instructors. In the future, discussions were to stress ways of improving military intergroup relations and to devote less time to examining racism in military history.⁵⁸

Taking place between 1974 and 1977, these changes coincided with a reduction in the number of mandated annual hours to be spent in such education, as well as a shift in the onus of this education onto commanders, who did not go through the intensive training that DRRI attendees had. Hence, DRRI graduates spent far less time in race-based instruction. While seventy percent of those graduating from DRRI between 1971-74 went on to work full time on RR instruction, by 1976 this figure had dropped to ten percent.⁵⁹ Thus, by the mid-1970s, the value of both the Institute and of race relations education more generally began to shift in the minds of military and political leaders, prompting changes in DRRI's racial framework and pedagogical methods, as well as in the workload of those it trained.

Conclusions

Founded amidst a complex configuration of fears, anxieties and desires for change, DRRI did not simply represent the military's attempts to heed the frustrations of service personnel of color, despite its recent characterization as such.⁶⁰ Seeing DRRI in such triumphalist terms oversimplifies the historical moment in which the Institute was founded and fails to interrogate the complex political meanings attached to the Institute. For many, there was a clear expectation that DRRI would aid political and military leaders in the quest to contain black 'militancy,' that race relations training would alleviate the military's racial tensions by bringing black 'militants' around to less radical ways of thinking. As the post-Lejeune Congressional subcommittee put it, the Armed Forces was in 'battle with black militants for the minds of...young marines' and other service personnel.⁶¹ DRRI's role in this 'battle' was not uncomplicated, but, as I have tried to show, many imagined that the 'minds' of new or young service personnel could be won over through the race relations trainings of DRRI

⁵⁷ Marc Huet, 'House Panel Criticizes DoD Race Relations Training', *S&S*, 1 Dec. 1973, 10.

⁵⁸ Hope, 58.

⁵⁹ Day, 254-56, 263.

⁶⁰ Hampton, *Black Officer Corps*, 123.

⁶¹ 'Inquiry into the Disturbances at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune'.

graduates. In other words, to many, the Institute was to serve as an epistemological intervention into the consciousness of a generation of young black ‘militants.’

However, the racial epistemology that military and political leaders sought to contain was, in fact, eagerly adopted by the Institute, and central to this epistemology was a critique of whiteness as a nexus of racialized power. As I have argued elsewhere, the post-war black freedom movement represented rich critiques of whiteness, and these were analyses that whites (like Terry) often engaged and proselytized.⁶² Certainly different from the academic tradition that would later be called ‘critical whiteness studies’, these ideas still shared a good deal with this later academic tradition. They explored the connections between racial inequalities and white domination and anticipated a number of the central tenets of critical whiteness studies. As feminist sociologist Ruth Frankenberg showed many years later, DRRI suggested that whiteness often went ‘unmarked’ though it shaped the culture and policies of both the military and wider US society, and as cultural geographer Anoop Nayak would later argue, DRRI’s focus on whiteness redirected the dominant racial gaze (generally onto blackness, including black ‘militancy’) and centered the accountability of whites in racial injustices.⁶³ Foundational to the racial episteme of DRRI in the early 1970s was an understanding of the relationship between the social construction of whiteness, power and racism, and indeed, these were the kinds of connections that putatively ‘militant’ black freedom activists had been trying to draw throughout the 1960s.

Unsurprisingly, then, it was once again charges of racial ‘militancy’ that altered the military’s handling of race relations, though this time through a confrontation with and containment of DRRI. Certainly, DRRI’s early years presented, to repeat Bob Stitt, a ‘progressive and forward looking race relations experiment’, especially in the context of a ‘conservative organization.’ Yet to accuse the Institute of creating race ‘militants’ was to delegitimize it. As with its usage in regards to black military personnel, the label ‘militant’ worked to de-legitimize certain behaviors, claims and, especially, ways of understanding race. It was, thus, far more about perceptions of black ‘militancy’ and ‘proper’ race relations than actual acts of recalcitrance or rebellion on DRRI’s part that prompted these fears. It was as some military personnel began to sound like Black Power advocates that they were perceived as ‘militants’ and when political and military leadership began to clamp down on DRRI.

That race ‘militancy’ proved so worrying to military leadership that it secretly surveilled its own race relations entity reveals the urgency with which it sought to contain ‘black militancy’. Even in the

⁶² Say Burgin, ‘Locating Douglass Fitch: The Roots of Colour and Activist Traditions of United States Critical Whiteness Studies’ *ACRAWSA E-Journal*, 9, 1 (2013): <http://www.acrawsa.org.au/files/ejournalfiles/197Burgin20131.pdf>.

⁶³ Anoop Nayak, ‘Critical Whiteness Studies’, *Sociology Compass*, 1, 2 (2007), 737-55 (738).

arena of race relations, perhaps especially in this realm, ideas about race and racism needed to be regulated. Of course, the surveillance of DRRI must be seen as part of a much longer legacy of governmental reconnaissance of supposed race ‘militants’, especially with regards to African Americans. However it also speaks to the ways in which the epithet, label or accusation of ‘militancy’ became attached, not just to certain racial justice activists, groups, or movements, but also to racial epistemologies. As Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., has argued with regard to federal efforts to ‘suppress’ progressive black activists in the years following WWI, ‘The “crime” which justified such surveillance was almost always the ideas they expressed.’⁶⁴ The earliest years of DRRI corroborate this point – that it was the way one thought about race and racism, as much as the actions one took in light of that knowledge, that could raise suspicions of race ‘militancy’.

⁶⁴ Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998), p. xii