

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 23  
Number 1 *January*

Article 10

---

1970

# Constraints of the Negro Civil Rights Movement on American Military Effectiveness: A Survey

George L. Jackson  
*U.S. Navy*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jackson, George L. (1970) "Constraints of the Negro Civil Rights Movement on American Military Effectiveness: A Survey," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 23 : No. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol23/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

*Clausewitz asserted that military force was in essence a means of achieving foreign policy objectives. During the last decade the ability of the U.S. military forces to achieve such objectives has been constrained in a variety of ways by the civil rights movement. It is important that the military recognize these constraints without rejecting the legitimate aspirations of the civil rights movement.*

## **CONSTRAINTS OF THE NEGRO CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT ON AMERICAN MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS: A SURVEY**

An article prepared by

**Commander George L. Jackson, U.S. Navy**

**School of Naval Command and Staff**

The Negro civil rights movement in the United States has been in process for more than a century, constituting a significant element in the continuing struggle for greater individual freedom. Prior to World War II, American military institutions contained many of the same patterns of racial prejudice prevalent in the general society. The cross-cultural exchanges and multiracial situations resulting from World War II dramatized the basic morality of equal rights for all peoples and races. The sweeping changes which characterized the racial patterns of post-World War II American society were witnessed in the Nation's Armed Forces, and in many instances the Armed Forces were able to accommodate better to the necessary changes than the greater society.

While progress toward greater Negro civil rights was considerable during the two decades prior to 1960, many contended that the pace of change was too slow and advocated a departure from

legal procedures. Negro civil rights activity became increasingly marked by illegitimate measures that challenged the legitimacy of established authority and instilled fear within the general population. When a significant segment of the society regarded civil rights activity as dangerous and reacted with suppressive measures, the civil rights movement took on the trappings of a revolution.

The Negro civil rights movement will continue to exert significant influence upon every aspect of American society in the immediate future. The nation's military establishment has been affected by the movement in much the same manner as principal social institutions. The morality of the movement notwithstanding, the Negro civil rights action has introduced definite constraints on the military capability of the United States.

The most important of these constraints is that produced by the coalition of civil rights organizations and the

antiwar organizations. This coalition has spearheaded the shift of public opinion away from support of the Vietnam conflict. On the surface it would appear that the two do not possess sufficient common goals to justify such an alliance, but the concern of the civil rights leaders over the priority accorded Vietnam vice domestic reform programs has caused them to align themselves with the antiwar group.

The identification of the civil rights movement with the antiwar enthusiasts was given its greatest impetus in April of 1967, when the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King took a strong public stand on the issue. Labeling the American Government as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world," Dr. King called for a halt in the bombing of North and South Vietnam, a unilateral cease-fire, the withdrawal of American troops, and negotiation with the National Liberation Front. He urged all blacks and "white people of goodwill" to boycott the draft by seeking conscientious objector status until his program was achieved. Dr. King indicated that there were three primary reasons which compelled him to take a stand against the Vietnam war: first, an awareness that the war was "playing havoc with domestic destinies" and making it more difficult to implement programs to deal with the economic and social problems of the Negro and poor people generally; second, a fear that constant escalation of the war could lead to a grand war with China and another world war; and third, the extension to international affairs of his personal philosophy of nonviolence.<sup>1</sup>

While Dr. King did not gain the immediate adherence of other civil rights leaders to his position on the Vietnam war, he was a man of international stature and the acknowledged leader of the American Negro civil rights movement. His influence among Negroes was great, and his association with

the antiwar groups was of profound significance on the national scene.

The growing public disillusionment with the Vietnam war, of which Dr. King's declaration was an essential part, made it more difficult for the military to conclude the war in Vietnam by reducing its ability to generate effective military-political pressure. A group of 14 American scholars asserted this in December of 1967. These men, some of whom were authorities on Asian affairs, warned that the risk of confrontation would increase unless means of accommodation were found by nations possessing interests in the Pacific. In addition, they stated:

Hanoi is placing considerable hope at present upon the theory that the United States will end in Vietnam as did France—forced to accept defeat by a combination of internal political considerations and external pressures. As long as the Communists believe in this likelihood, they will take their present hard-line position. Only when they decide that the internal political resources of the United States match in some degree its external military power will any solution other than our unconditional surrender become feasible. In this sense, the outcome is being decided on the streets and in the homes of America as in the jungles of Vietnam. Both the government and its critics should face up to these facts.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the civil rights movement has served as a restraint upon the ability of American forces in Vietnam to complete their mission, so it has altered and restricted the use of military resources. The very purpose of American intervention—to guarantee the South Vietnamese people the right of self-determination—has helped focus the attention of the problem of minority

rights in the United States. It has demanded a consistency of policy in which civil rights and equality of opportunity for members of American minority groups have had to be considered in Department of Defense planning.

During his tenure Mr. Clifford observed that the Department of Defense had not been doing its share to promote domestic social aspects of life which are essential to the preservation of the Nation's fundamental institutions. Observing that the Department of Defense consumes 9 percent of the gross national product and employs 4½ million persons, he stressed the moral obligation of the Department to contribute to the social needs of the country. To this end he directed key Department officials, including service Secretaries, to propose measures which might be adopted to alleviate pressing domestic problems.<sup>3</sup> While it is not unusual for military resources to be employed in domestic situations, particularly during time of emergency or disaster, the assumption of additional domestic or social functions, such as police duties, must be expected to produce a corresponding drain on military capability. The quality and quantity of military forces available for employment, hence overall military capability in support of U.S. foreign policy, will be reduced to the degree that military resources are diverted to domestic programs.

Secretary Clifford further commented that American citizens have reason to expect—and even demand—that more of the time and resources of the Defense Establishment be committed to domestic problems. Although noting that the Department of Defense was not a primary instrument of social welfare and that nothing could be permitted to interfere with the performance of national defense, he pledged greater interest in the fields of housing, medical care and facilities, education, and employment commensurate with his Department's demonstrated

experience and interest. He cited Project 100,000, which admitted to military service a limited number of men who did not meet minimum intellectual entrance standards, as one specific instance of such action. He termed Project 100,000 a "spectacular success," with 90 percent of the personnel involved performing satisfactorily on active duty.<sup>4</sup>

The most apparent effect that the civil rights movement has had upon military force employment has been the necessity of using troops to quell civil disturbances. The National Guard has traditionally been used for this purpose. During the fiscal year 1968, 104,665 National Guardsmen were called to quell civil disturbances, many of which were precipitated by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. National Guard units were alerted for possible commitment in civil disturbances 77 times in 29 states and the District of Columbia. About one-fourth of those units alerted were used to quell disturbances in Detroit, Washington, and Chicago. The Detroit disturbance alone required 10,399 active duty Guardsmen and 5,547 active Army personnel to restore order.<sup>5</sup> In February of 1969 the Guard was also called to the campus of the University of Wisconsin to quell student disorders stemming from demands to establish a Negro curriculum and increase numbers of Negro students and faculty members. This was the first case in which Guardsmen were used to restore order on campus.<sup>6</sup>

The riots of 1968 produced changes in the organizational structure of the National Guard. A Department of Defense executive agency for civil disturbance matters was created within the Department of the Army, and emphasis was placed on the Guard's training for handling such matters. In addition, authority was granted for assembling and training Guard units on short notice when intelligence reports indicated a high probability that forces would be

required to quell civil disorder. The need for a Directorate for Civil Disturbance Planning and Operations with a permanent command center to handle concurrent civil disorder emergencies was also demonstrated.<sup>7</sup>

The direct influence of the civil rights movement on a specific military operation and underlying policy was witnessed in February 1967 when the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Franklin D. Roosevelt* made an operational visit to Capetown, Republic of South Africa. On 1 February, Negro leaders attending the third annual meeting of the American Negro Leadership Conference urged President Johnson to cancel the carrier's scheduled visit to Capetown and characterized the call as "an insult to American Negroes, to the black people of Africa, and to democratic men throughout the world." The African nation's apartheid policy was cited as the basis for the objection to the visit.<sup>8</sup>

The following day U.S. Navy sources indicated that the visit could not be canceled, despite opposition from civil rights leaders and Congressmen, because of the needs for fuel and shore liberty incident to the ship's 13,400-mile voyage from Southeast Asia to Mayport, Fla. The alternative to the visit would be to dispatch a fleet oiler on a 45-day voyage costing at least \$250,000 to provide the fuel required for the carrier if the visit were canceled.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequent reports revealed that while *Roosevelt* called at Capetown on 4 February—based on a decision made at "the highest level in Washington"—the 3,400-man crew remained aboard during the port visit. Since the *Roosevelt* visit, U.S. Navy ships have been denied permission to call at ports in the Republic of South Africa.<sup>10</sup>

The American Negro civil rights movement has also tended to constrain military capability by competing with the Defense establishment for available

Federal funds. Advocates of greater Federal aid to programs designed to improve the general situation of the Nation's minority groups, particularly in urban areas, recognize that substantial reductions in defense appropriations might free funds which might be channeled into domestic areas. One such advocate of greater emphasis on domestic social problems, Senator Eugene McCarthy, criticized policies which placed military action in Vietnam before domestic problems:

The most important struggle for the future welfare of America is not in the jungles of Vietnam; it is in the streets and schools and tenements of our cities. Yet the commitment of resources and moral energy to the problems of our cities has been but a fraction of the amount committed to the Saigon regime.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Alfred G. Buchler, Director of the Public Finance Center at the University of Pennsylvania, considers that the 1967-68 struggle between Congress and the administration illustrates the severity of contemporary problems related to the formulation, control, and financing of Federal programs. While aspects of this struggle have been present in the past, he considers that the racial disturbances, riots, urban unrest, and other recent disorders associated with the Negro movement have suddenly thrust the problem of Federal financing to the fore.<sup>12</sup> Although the underlying pressures of poverty, unequal income distribution, and politics have long existed, black action has placed the matter squarely before the Nation. The influence that this pressure can have on Federal budgeting could have a serious and damaging effect on the Nation's military capability should it be decided to increase Federal support to domestic problems at the expense of military force levels.

There are also demographic factors related to the Nation's military force levels which have been influenced by the civil rights movement. Sharp criticism surfaced in the spring of 1967 when reports indicated that Negroes comprised 11 percent of the total enlisted strength in Vietnam but accounted for 14.5 percent of Army combat forces and 22.5 percent of all Army troops killed in action. In response to this criticism the Department of Defense took steps to readjust force levels in order to achieve an equitable proportion and employment of Negroes in Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> This has wider implications in future conflicts. The military planner could conceivably be required, by the adverse publicity, to consider assignment of personnel to combat units on an accepted racial proportion rather than on combat qualifications.

Leading advocates of the civil rights movement have also been critical of the fact that 30.2 percent of qualified Negroes are drafted, while only 18.8 percent of qualified whites are inducted because of educational and other deferments. Their criticism has led to various proposals for draft reform such as the lottery system and the volunteer army, both of which would have a great effect upon the composition and hence the capability of our military forces.

Further criticisms have been leveled at the various services on account of the percentage of Negro officers and enlisted men in each. Negroes at present comprise 13 percent of the Army, 10 percent of the Air Force, 8 percent of the Marine Corps, 5.6 percent of the Navy, and 1.26 percent of the National Guard. Because of educational differences, the proportion of Negro officers to white officers is consistently less than that of Negro enlisted men to white enlisted men. Efforts to bring these ratios into line with the ratio of whites to Negroes in the general population would have a marked effect on the military. Such efforts have already been

initiated by the Defense Department in relation to the National Guard.<sup>14</sup> In an effort to implement the recommendations of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, the Defense Department is expected to attempt to raise Negro membership to approximately the proportion of Negroes in the general population.

Military capability cannot be evaluated only in terms of force levels or employment. The factor of morale is extremely important, and a low morale on the part of Negro personnel lessens their effectiveness and that of the forces to which they are assigned.

Negro military personnel are exposed to a variety of conditions and influences which would tend to reduce their loyalty to the United States and its military forces. The most important of these is, perhaps, hostility among their fellow servicemen. The likely effect of racial dissention upon military effectiveness has been recognized by the Department of Defense. Reacting to an increasing number of reports of growing tensions between whites and Negroes in military organizations, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird called upon military commanders to ensure that racial differences were removed.<sup>15</sup>

The Negro serviceman also faces discriminatory practices in his dealings with civilians, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 notwithstanding. While the Federal Government has undertaken to eliminate such discriminatory practices, it is still obvious to many Negro servicemen that they are not welcome in the housing, schools, and churches of some of the Nation's communities, and this does not fail to affect their morale.

Another extremely important factor in this situation is the appeal of Negro militants and civil rights leaders. The late Dr. Martin Luther King struck directly at the motivation of Negro military personnel when he asserted that the Vietnam war was an instrument of "Negro genocide" forged by America's

"white masters."<sup>16</sup> Other Negroes have sought to enlist American servicemen in militant civil rights organizations, and radical students groups have urged election of officers, unionization of enlisted personnel, and the abolition of the salute and privileges of rank. It would be naive to think that such statements and appeals have no effect on the motivation and loyalty of Negro servicemen. Negro servicemen are, in fact, torn between appeals to their racial pride by civil rights organizations and the demands of military service.

Certain aspects of the antimilitary phase of the civil rights movement have been discussed previously. Aside from his basic objection to war, Dr. King based his objection to the Vietnam war on its effects on the civil rights effort, and the disproportionate burden on Negro military personnel. He considered the war was rooted in the militaristic nature of American society, and he observed: "... you can't really have freedom without justice, you can't have peace without justice, and you can't have justice without peace, so it is more of a realization of the interrelatedness of racism and militarism and the need to attack both problems rather than leaving one."<sup>17</sup>

Senator J. William Fulbright has been an outspoken critic of recent American military and foreign policy, particularly the Vietnam war. In the following he employed the issue of the civil rights movement to support his objection to the Vietnam war by suggesting that two wars are occurring simultaneously:

One is the war of power politics which our soldiers are fighting in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The other is a war for America's soul which is being fought in the streets of Newark and Detroit and in the halls of Congress, in churches and protest meetings and on college campuses, and in the hearts of silent Americans from

Maine to Hawaii. I believe that the two wars have something to do with each other, not in the direct casual way that bureaucrats require as proof of a connection between two things, but in a subtler moral and qualitative way that is no less real for being intangible. Each of these wars might well be going on in the absence of the other, but neither, I suspect, standing alone, would seem so hopeless and demoralizing.<sup>18</sup>

Accepting his party's nomination as a presidential candidate in the 1968 presidential campaign, Richard M. Nixon expressed the implications of the civil rights movement for the Nation's world military role: "A nation that can't keep the peace at home won't be trusted to keep the peace abroad."<sup>19</sup>

Former Under Secretary of State Eugene V. Rostow expressed concern that the increasing tendency to seek quick solutions for the problems of poverty, the cities, and civil rights could adversely affect America's international role. While unequivocally supporting the importance of greater racial equality, he argued against action which would attempt to improve domestic conditions at the expense of international commitments: "If it is true that we cannot have a world role and a good society together, then we shall not have either one. It is no good building model cities if they are to be bombed in twenty years' time."<sup>20</sup>

## SUMMARY

This discussion has focused on several areas in which the American Negro civil rights movement appears to be constraining the status, employment, strength, and attitude of the military forces. As a result, the Nation's capacity to pursue foreign policy objectives through military action has been

affected. Antimilitary sentiment has increased concurrent with the Negro civil rights movement. It is reflected in the competition for limited Federal resources and attention, the disaffection over America's use of force to achieve objectives, and the disenchantment with the Nation's role in Vietnam. Similarly, the employment of American military forces has been directly affected by revolutionary activity, particularly through the need to divert military forces to assist local authorities in ensuring domestic order and through the loss of the use of ports in the Republic of South Africa. The effect of the movement on force levels was evidenced by greater concern for race in the allocation of personnel to perform tasks and in criticism of the draft. Finally, it was seen that there is concern over the possible adverse effect on the attitude of Negro military personnel arising from their perception of the issues raised by the Negro movement as bearing on their military roles.

The current turmoil over the issue of greater civil rights for America's Negroes is the outgrowth of more than a century of unacceptable progress. It is likely that necessary progress could not be obtained from a continuation of non-revolutionary measures. However, con-

tinuing vigilance must be maintained to provide a military posture that ensures this Nation's security from aggression by enemies who would seek to exploit internal weaknesses resulting from inadequate efforts to obtain the fullest benefits of the Nation for the entire population.

---

### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Comdr. George L. Jackson received an associate of arts degree from Hartnell College in 1952 and a bachelor's degree in the social sciences from the University of Redlands in 1954. He has subsequently done graduate work at the University of Maryland and at San Diego State University in the field of sociology. As a communications specialist he has served in a variety of assignments, including naval communications stations in Guam, Morocco, and Adak, Alaska, and as the Commander of the Research and Operations Detachment on the U.S.S. *Pvt. Jose F. Valdez* (AG 169). Commander Jackson is a graduate of the Naval War College, School of Naval Command and Staff, (1969) and is currently assigned to the Naval Facility, Danang, South Vietnam.

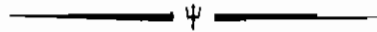
---

### FOOTNOTES

1. "Dr. King to Weigh Civil Disobedience if War Intensifies," *The New York Times*, 2 April 1967, p. 1:4, 76:1.
2. "Excerpts from a Statement on U.S. Policy in Asia Made by 14 American Scholars," *The New York Times*, 20 December 1967, p. 14:1.
3. Clark M. Clifford, "The Defense Establishment—Domestic Development," *Vital Speeches*, 1 November 1968, p. 35.
4. *Ibid.*
5. U.S. National Guard Bureau, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1968* (Washington: 1968), p. 13, 15.
6. "Troops Sent to U. of Wisconsin," *The New York Times*, 2 February 1967, p. 2:4.
7. U.S. National Guard Bureau, p. 16.
8. Thomas A. Johnson, "Call at Capetown by Ship Opposed," *The New York Times*, 2 February 1967, p. 2:4.
9. Benjamin Welles, "Navy Stands Fast on Capetown Visit," *The New York Times*, 3 February 1967, p. 10:2.
10. "Apartheid Keeps Crew on U.S. Ship," *The New York Times*, 5 February 1967, p. 1:4, 26:1.



11. Eugene J. McCarthy, *First Things First: New Priorities for Americans* (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 20.
12. Alfred G. Buchler, "The Cost of Democracy," *The Annals*, September 1968, p. 11.
13. Ulysses Lee, "The Draft and the Negro," *Current History*, July 1968, p. 47.
14. "Negro Membership in Guard Declines," *The Providence Journal*, 24 March 1969, p. 1:2, 8:3.
15. "Laird Warns of Growing Race Tensions in Services," *Navy Times*, 28 May 1969, p. 33:2.
16. *The United States in World Affairs 1967* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 5.
17. "Dr. King to Weigh Civil Disobedience if War Intensifies," p. 76:1.
18. J. William Fulbright, "The Price of Empire," *Vital Speeches*, 1 September 1967, p. 678-679.
19. Richard M. Nixon, "Acceptance Speech," *Vital Speeches*, 1 September 1968, p. 676.
20. Eugene V. Rostow, "Another Round in the Great Debate—American Security in an Unstable World," *Vital Speeches*, 15 November 1967, p. 70.



There is a time for all things: there is even a time for change; and that is when it can no longer be resisted.

*Duke of Cambridge, 1819-1904*