

USAFA National Character & Leadership Symposium Speech 25Feb11 Charles V. Bush

Diversity Is A Leadership Issue ©2011, Charles V. Bush

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. I am always pleased to visit my alma mater, the Air Force Academy. I arrived as a Doolie Cadet, over 50 years ago, into the Class of 1963. I am a member of the fifth graduating class and the first class to spend its full four years on the USAFA permanent site. Our class color was gold, hence we were dubbed "The Golden Boys" -- we were quite full of ourselves. Indeed, it was said that instead of the traditional graduation, they planned to row us out to the middle of the reservoir, leave us, and have us walk back.

It is important you understand that no matter how critically any of my remarks may be interpreted—I love this school and the Air Force! Today, I have been asked to make some cogent observations about the theme..."**Strength Within and Leadership Throughout**". I was asked to make my remarks, concise. Well, I am mindful of George Bernard Shaw, who told a famous orator he had 15 minutes to speak. The orator protested, "How can I possibly tell them all I know in 15 minutes?" Shaw replied, "I advise you to speak slowly".

Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us that "**Life is a journey, not a destination.**" It is with that admonition in mind and given that my African-American and Native American ancestors have passed on to me a story-telling tradition, I will share a portion of my life story. It is a story of a boy who was given the opportunity to become a pioneer, pathfinder and trailblazer and assumed the responsibility of providing the broadest and strongest possible shoulders upon which the, roughly 2200 fellow

Air Force Academy African–American and other minority cadets and graduates can stand.

In the early 1950's, the civil rights movement was in its infancy, it was the time of the desegregated South, where Negro men were being lynched with impunity and President Harry S. Truman's executive order integrating the Armed Forces was being implemented, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. My parents were college graduates from Morehouse College and Florida A&M University. I was raised on the campus of Howard University, became the first Black Page on Capitol Hill, and the first African–American to graduate from the U.S. Air Force Academy. Let me tell you a little about my story “

As a seven year old college campus brat I manifested an early thirst for knowledge and was included in a group of neighborhood kids, who, each Saturday, would walk a mile or so to the public library for our week's worth of books to read. I always exhausted them well before the week was out.

Moving along – my junior high school, Banneker Jr. High, was staffed with teachers who were the mothers and fathers of many of us and the friends of the parents of the rest of us. We were **expected** to achieve and succeed and our progress was closely monitored. My homeroom teacher, Mrs. Houston, was an impressive educator and molder of young people, who indelibly imprinted on the minds of us boys that we could take advantage of the outstanding education we were to receive or we could spend a future digging ditches. Message delivered and message received – to this day I tend to avoid manual labor like the plague. She also made it clear that in the world we were entering, in order to compete with a white boy,

for the same position, we would have to be two to three times as capable – so we best pay close attention. It was an impressive academic environment and I learned well.

In the latter part of the 1950's, Emmett Till was murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi; Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat at the front of the "colored section" of a bus to a white passenger; Martin Luther King established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and, nine black students were blocked from entering a high school on the orders of Governor Orval Faubus.

In 1954, at the end of the ninth grade, the United States Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, rendered the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision, which ended school segregation. In order to make their intent clear, Chief Justice Earl Warren reached into the District of Columbia school system and, at the age of fourteen, selected me as the first Negro Page to serve on Capitol Hill. Though the House of Representatives and the Senate had 20–30 Pages, respectively, there were only four Pages to serve the nine Supreme Court Justices.

The Congress, and its patronage system, was controlled by Dixiecrats, or the Southern wing of the Democratic Party, so most of the Pages were politically-connected, assertive young males from the segregated South. They were not thrilled with my arrival. So the only Jewish boy and I would sit by ourselves in the school library. Even the white principal and teachers felt awkward and committed cultural fauxpas but their hearts were in the right place and we sorted it out.

At the Supreme Court, I was introduced to a management–employee structure stratified by race. All management and administrative positions were occupied by whites, predominantly white male. The police force was all white male, with no college education. The manual labor force was all

Black and was overseen by a white boss, who was right out of the movies about the South, in appearance and demeanor. The messengers/chauffeurs were all Black. The culture was a powerful reminder that Washington, D.C, is a Southern city. **“Relationships matter!”**

In this milieu, the Chief Justice made my role in the Supreme Court hierarchy **very clear** and so I learned to live with the cultural pressures generated by folks treating someone that was Black, as though he was white and the resentment, confusion, and slips, that resulted. Even the Black employees had to adjust because they were adults and I was a kid—however, they were very proud of me and made sure that I was treated fairly and properly.

My post, for the three year period, was in the Chief Justice’s Anteroom. When foreign heads of state would visit Washington, D.C., one of their governmental stops was a visit to the U.S. Supreme Court and the Chief Justice. I was introduced to many high profile foreign statesmen, including President Sukarno of Indonesia and Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus. I also stood by in the Anteroom during judicial deliberations on cases, which were held in the Chief Justice’s Conference Room. One of the highlights of our year was the Annual Supreme Court Justices and Pages Luncheon, hosted by the Chief Justice. **“Diversity is a leadership issue.”**

In school during class break, the school library would frequently be packed to standing room only. Often, racially derogatory jokes were well in progress. When the group became aware of my presence an embarrassed silence would ensue. On one occasion, the Biology teacher, who was normally very sensitive, pointed out to the class the distinctive dorsal versus ventral coloration in animals, e.g. on bottom feeders such as flounder. She chose the difference in the color of the top of my hand

versus the inner surface, as an illustration. She was totally oblivious to my astonished reaction.

As we approached graduation, several of us class leaders awaited the announcement of class awards. I was disappointed when I did not receive a couple of the well known awards. What I was not told was that the school officials had permitted several of the leading citizens' organizations, e.g. Kiwanis et al, to disqualify me, on the basis of race. Not unlike many minorities in this society, I had been so bold to assume it was a fair competition. **"Diversity is a leadership Issue."**

From these experiences, I emerged with a firm understanding that—**"Relationships matter!"** I learned to regard these folks at school and at the Supreme Court who were of a different color and a different culture as individuals, irrespective of state of origin and irrespective of dialect or drawl. I also learned that one cannot build relationships during a crisis, for the chips are high and trust is at a premium. Relationships must be fostered overtime, so the trust necessary in conflict has been built into the relationship. **"Relationships Matter!"**

I am mindful of a Russian fable: A silly sparrow decided he would not fly south for the winter but would instead stay in the frozen North. When the cold nearly froze him to death, he fell from the tree and lay on the ground. A cow came along and took a dump on him. The manure warmed him and when he defrosted he was so happy he started to sing. This drew the attention of a cat that cleared away the manure and promptly ate the little bird. Moral of the story: 1) Everyone who takes a dump on you is not necessarily your enemy. 2) Everyone who digs you out of manure is not necessarily your friend. 3) When you're in a pile of manure just appreciate that you are warm and happy and keep your mouth shut!

In order to deal with another culture, one must adapt and learn the language—words and dialect—learn the culture, observe the customs, wear the clothing and eat the cuisine. At a young age, I had to learn to adapt, while retaining my culture and self respect. I lived in a culture of white male entitlement, while demanding a reasonable share of the pie—which demand, in a world perceived as a zero sum game, was frequently viewed as unheard of, arrogant, impertinent, a lowering of some hypothetical standard and/or outrageous. Some would submit that strong resistance is common when minority groups threaten the privileged status of a dominant majority; furthermore, **privilege is often invisible to those who have it.**

I had compiled an exemplary high school record of academic, athletic and leadership achievement, and applied to MIT, Caltech, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), Howard University and the U.S. Air Force Academy. 35 students sat for a competitive exam for D.C.'s one Academy nomination. I ranked No. 2 - not quite good enough. I was accepted to RPI, unfortunately without a scholarship, but I did win, however, a competitive scholarship to Howard University.

I spent two years studying for a major in electrical engineering at Howard University and was enrolled in AFROTC, under Professor of Air Science, LtCol. Thomas J. Money, and a AFROTC faculty which included Maj. Clarence Shivers, an accomplished artist, and Maj. Clarence "Lucky" Lester. During WW II, Maj. "Lucky" Lester had shot down three German fighters within five minutes, as a member of the 332nd Fighter Group, in Italy. Later, LtCol(Ret) Shivers and his lovely wife, Peggy, retired to a home across from USAFA. This notable couple rendered moral support to many of us African-American Cadets and alumni over the years, and

Clarence Shivers was the sculptor of the Tuskegee Airman figure in front of Harmon Hall.

While in my second year at Howard University I was contacted by MGen Benjamin L. Hunton (USAR) and the Honorable James C. Evans. The Honorable James C. Evans served five Secretaries of War, ten Secretaries of Defense and six Presidents in his role of overseeing the integration of the U.S. Armed Forces. He and Gen. Hunton recruited me to the U.S. Air Force Academy, in 1959, to assist in the integration of USAFA. "Diversity is a leadership issue."

As we entered the 1960's the de-segregation of the South began to take place with nonviolent protests, freedom riders and the testing of new anti-segregation laws; also, James Meredith became the first Black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi.

I am frequently asked, **"What was it like to be the first? What kind of pressures did you undergo?"** From a cultural point of view, my experience of not just surviving but thriving in a small school composed of Southern whites who, generally, did not view me as an equal for three years, more than prepared me to enter into the competitive USAFA environment. I was on the Superintendent's List for the four years. I was a Cadet Squadron Commander in my senior year and passed on the opportunity to be a Cadet Group Commander, in order to assure being selected for the Dean's joint USAFA/Georgetown University Masters degree program. This entailed taking graduate courses, primarily, in my senior year. During June Week, I was reading Izvestia and Pravda, the Russian newspapers, in preparation for grad school Russian language comprehensives.

My extracurricular activity was the Debate Team. My partner was part scholar/part comedian—a special person. The F-4C fighter aircraft at

USAFA Gate 2 was dedicated to Pat Wynne, lost in North Vietnam, my Debate partner-- whom I still miss. We travelled around the country, engaging in intercollegiate debate competitions—it was fun. However, there was one distinct negative about USAFA for me—I considered it to be a monastery. I had grown up in Washington, D.C., which had a girl/boy ratio close to 11:1; combine that with a thriving Black middle class, with an abundance of pretty daughters and “Br’er Rabbit was in the briar patch”. So they locate USAFA in the West, in a town with a strong religious and politically conservative persuasion and few Black people. Barred from interracial dating, under stress, I had learned to be culturally adaptable. However, this was a ridiculous social condition.

We had our racially stressful moments. Just as, in my opinion, this current faculty and staff needs to culturally adjust to diversity, we had some problems with our chain of command. On the class visit to Ft. Benning, GA, the local country club threw a dance for our class—but the USAFA Staff asked the three of us, Black Cadets, to find something else to do. My white classmates were, generally, unaware of our treatment until told at our 40th Class Reunion, where they apologized for our treatment.

Apparently, the cultural taboo with respect to interracial dating still reigned, five years later. An incident was shared with me of a Cadet that was warned of interracial dating by an instructor. When the warning was ignored, the instructor lowered the Cadet’s course grade from a B to a D. The story continues—the Cadet appealed the wrong to the Head of the department. The Department Head investigated and found the allegation to be true. He informed the Cadet that action was being taken to restore his B in the course. When the Cadet asked about what discipline would be rendered to the Instructor, the Department Head was aghast. He said we must not speak further of this incident because it would hurt the instructor’s career and his family. The matter was closed--a case of the

culture protecting its own. This is not unlike an alien organism which when thrust into a human body provokes the attack of antibodies, until it morphs into an organism that mimics the body's own, sufficiently well to not warrant attack.

I have an observation and suggestion concerning cultural change. A couple of years ago, my annual guest lectures were interrupted by flotsam resulting from a significant diversity incident, about which I had not been forewarned and, indeed, was not common knowledge. For the first time in three years' of lectures, I was faced with Cadets eliciting, if not demanding, my opinion on the position that recent progress in diversity was resulting in a lowering of standards—a popular conservative political talking point, which they stated was being shared with them by members of faculty and staff. First, since I was aware that they had read my biography, I inquired if my career record of achievement demonstrated the performance of someone who would subscribe to a lowering of standards—they conceded my point. Secondly, I pointed out that the recent quality of admits demonstrated an increase in quality against historical records. I view this resistance to change as perceiving diversity to be unwanted competition in what is being viewed as a zero sum game. There is a gap between how people think the system works and how the system actually works. An assessment of performance is oft influenced by favoritism, nepotism, sexual and/or racial discrimination or a host of other subjective measures. **“Diversity is a leadership issue.”**

When I approached LtGen John R. Rosa, USAFA Supt., on diversity, it was with the concern that minority representation at USAFA had seriously retrogressed in the previous 10–15 year period. While our initial focus on minority representation was on USAFA Admissions, the problem was systemic. Dimensionally, African–American Cadet admits, while in the area of 125 per Class, in the mid 1990's, had plummeted to around 65

per Class, in recent years— a large number of whom were athletes. While we have had notable high profile minority athletes over the years in football, basketball and track—indeed Olympic gold medalists— of the 27 Head Coaches, only two are of color and there are no minority executives in the USAFA Athletic Department senior management. Additionally, USAFA’s faculty is 8% diverse and non-tenured while Annapolis faculty is 22% diverse and tenured and West Point faculty is 25% diverse and also non-tenured.

We have found that the religious and political conservatism found in the Colorado Springs culture is, not surprisingly, reflected in the culture of the civilian and military permanent party of USAFA. It is apparent in the reflexive “circle the wagons” response to criticism and calls for change, and in the case of those perceived to be “whistleblowers”, the tendency to expend 80% of effort on seeking out and punishing the perpetrator and 20% on the alleged underlying problem. When I was at USAFA, one of my favorite observations was that West Point represented 150 years of tradition unhampered by progress; somehow that spirit has come to rest at my own School.

In my initial meeting with LtGen John F. Regni, who succeeded LtGen Rosa as USAFA Supt., we reviewed these challenges and his intent to have drafted a Strategic Diversity Plan for USAFA Admissions. He explained that his principal quandary with diversity in admissions, stemmed from the fact that while the Army and Navy had levied diversity recruitment goals on West Point and Annapolis, respectively, Air Force General Counsel would not permit the Air Force to do so. This position was rooted in a very conservative interpretation of the University of Michigan Supreme Court decision with respect to considering race as a factor in admissions policy. An amicus curiae brief, “friends of the Court”, whose

signatories included former secretaries of defense and notable military leaders, including Gen. Ron Fogleman, Chief of Staff, USAF, argued, “Based on decades of experience, amici have concluded that a highly qualified, racially diverse officer corps educated and trained to command our nation’s racially diverse enlisted ranks is essential to the military’s ability to fulfill its principal mission to provide national security.”

“Diversity is a leadership issue.”

Having determined that Gen. Regni was reasonably committed to diversity at USAFA, given the direction and/or lack of direction being received from USAF senior leadership, I enlisted the assistance of my respected classmate, Gen. Ron Fogleman (Ret.) to assist me in addressing the lack of Air Force diversity to Air Force senior leadership. We agreed that, with his leadership and support, we would embark on an effort to persuade Air Force senior leadership to provide more progressive leadership on diversity. In April 2008, on the anniversary, of pursuing this initiative, Ron Fogleman opined that it was difficult to get Air Force senior leadership to focus on anything.

During the year, we had sought the racial/ethnic profile of the Air Force officer corps. We found the bureaucratic resistance to disclosure of public information is enormous. However, one of the “K Street” lobbyist firms which assists us, pro bono, found that all Defense Dept. elements are required to provide personnel demographic data semi-annually, to Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) and DEOMI issues a report annually. Using this DEOMI demographic data and an Excel database, with pivot tables, we issued our 2008 “DOD Executive Diversity Study”. The team was made up of a cross section of USAFA grads, including three USAFA Rhodes Scholars but a number of the

alumni were reluctant to be named, for career, professional and personal reasons, so only four of us were named as co-authors.

This Study was particularly important because the demographic profile of the United States will change dramatically over the next 45 years. The population is projected to increase, from 296 million persons in 2005, to 438 million persons in 2050. Critically, the race/ethnic composition of the population will change significantly. Caucasians will decline, from 67% of the population in 2005, to 47% in 2050, while Hispanics will increase, from 14% of the population in 2005, to 29% in 2050 and African-Americans are projected to remain at 13% of the population in 2005, and 13% in 2050.

We found that in FY 2007, the DOD Executive Corps consisted of about 2,800 executives leading a force of 2,861,000 airmen, soldiers, sailors and marines. A DOD Executive is defined as a one to four-star general or admiral and the equivalent civilian Senior Executive Service (SES) grades. Our findings indicated that Caucasians, regardless of gender, possessed higher promotion rates to the executive corps as compared to minorities. The data indicates that Caucasians rise to the DOD executive ranks at a rate three times greater than Native Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders, four times greater than African-Americans, and six times greater than Hispanics. Reviewing this data, it is difficult to conclude that diversity initiatives had been priorities for DOD organizations. **We concluded this failure has been largely due to organizations approaching diversity more as a personnel program than a critical mission element, strategically imperative to national security.**

The implications of the data are clear; there is a direct correlation between race, ethnicity, and promotion rates in the DOD Executive Corps. We noted in the Study: **“These poor diversity statistics are partly a result**

of the past and current low numbers of qualified diversity candidates and graduates from our nation's service academies and other officer-commissioning sources. This underrepresentation directly and adversely affects the pool of qualified diversity candidates available for senior promotions 25 years into the future."

At this point, the two Presidential candidates, their Transition Teams, selected Congressional leaders and the DOD civilian and military senior leadership were briefed on the Study. DoD leadership, generally, requested support and assistance in responding to the challenge. The Team's support was based on the condition that the response must be to make diversity an operational mission element instead of approaching it as a personnel program, i.e. affirmative action or equal opportunity. As a national security imperative, the implementation of diversity must be included in operational orders and commanders must be held accountable. The most enthusiastic response was from the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Adm. Gary Roughhead, whose diversity program had been initiated several years earlier by, now, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen. At great length, Adm. Roughhead expounded upon the Navy Diversity Strategic Plan and his personal involvement at all critical levels. **"Diversity is a leadership issue."**

At the Congressional level, while Congressmen Cummings of Maryland and Meek of Florida had been contemplating legislation, we were told, our Study, with its call for a Presidential Commission and its substantial statistical documentation of the size of the challenge, furthered their determination to file the legislation, which resulted in the establishment of the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC). This legislation tasked the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) to "conduct a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of policies that provide opportunities for the promotion and advancement of minority members

of the Armed Forces, including minority members who are senior officers."

Shortly after we released the Study, Gen. Norton A. Schwartz assumed command of USAF and reviewed the Study. I briefed him on the lack of response that Gen. Fogleman and I had had with his predecessors on making diversity an Air Force priority. He responded that he was persuaded by our analysis and asked for my recommendation as to how to proceed. I stated that we felt that the Navy had a best practices diversity plan and program, and CNO Adm. Gary Roughhead was amenable to providing the assistance that the Air Force required, so we didn't need to reinvent the wheel. Shepherded by LtGen Richard Newton, Deputy Chief of Staff (DCS) Manpower and Personnel (A1) , with the assistance of the Navy N1, the Air Staff proceeded to rough out a suggested approach. The diversity construct, proposed and approved, consists of an AF Diversity Committee and an Air Force Diversity Operations Office . The Diversity Operations Office is responsible for the daily operations of executing the Chief's AF Diversity Road Map . The Diversity Office proceeded to produce the Road Map, communication plan, and campaign plan combining the SecAF/CSAF's intent, vision, mission statement, strategic objective, and targeted action plans.

Members of the Air Force Diversity Operations Office collaborated with the Air Staff and the Staffs of the major commands to draft the Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap, with priorities to "institutionalize diversity throughout the Air Force and allow the service to attract, recruit, develop and retain a high quality, talented total force." On *Sept. 14, 2010*, Gen. Norton Schwartz, Chief of Staff, USAF, in a keynote speech to the Air Force Assn., stated: "A diverse military environment is, in my mind, a military necessity, as it better prepares our people and our institution to

engage in a dynamic, multi-faceted, and nuanced world. So, we must encourage the conditions for greater meaningful diversity—that which truly enhances our effectiveness." On 13Oct10, Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley promulgated Air Force Policy Directive 36-70, Personnel: Diversity, which commences with the statement: "Diversity is a military necessity." Air Force senior leadership had removed the diversity policy ambiguity that permitted Air Force Counsel to argue that metrics could not be attached to the attainment of diversity goals. Measuring performance is part of the Air force culture.

On Oct.18, Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Air Force Diversity Senior Working Group, comprised of Air Force senior leaders, including more than 50 general officers, that the armed services "can't go fast enough" to increase diversity. When he was Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) his senior leaders regularly reported to him on their progress in increasing diversity, Mullen said. "We measured ourselves on that ... and if there were senior officers that weren't doing this, they were leaving." "Diversity is a leadership issue."

Air Force senior leaders validated the Air Force Diversity Strategic Road Map during the Air Force Diversity Senior Working Group session Oct. 17 and 18, and reaffirmed their collective commitment to diversity. On Nov17, Air Force senior leaders released the Diversity Strategic Road Map which is designed to take a sweeping approach in leveraging the spectrum of talent and perspectives of its members. General Newton said the Air Force leaders will measure the service's diversity successes and track progress. **"Diversity is a leadership issue."**

US Air Force Academy (USAFA) leadership has embarked upon several diversity initiatives, principal of which has been the reform of the Directorate of Admissions. In my view, the business model in my day was

an admissions model. In the intervening years, the challenges of the environment required morphing to a recruiting model. This dramatic adjustment has required different management, skillsets, attitudes, sensitivities, and systems. Additionally, it has required a reeducation of the Air Liaison Officer force and will require a relook at the organizational construct and management of this large ALO force.

We have welcomed the appointment of: a) My colleague, LtGen. John Hopper(Ret.), as a Commissioner, Military Leadership Diversity Commission; b) USAFA Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Adis Vila, as recommended in the USAFA Strategic Diversity Plan; and, c) My colleague, Mr. Alfredo Sandoval, as Vice Chair, USAFA Board of Visitors.

The Air Force is now in a critical phase when leadership's commitment to diversity will be sorely tested—it will require leadership at all levels, including the Staff and Faculty of this institution. **"Diversity is a leadership issue."**

Upon that note I would like to leave you with this poem:

The Bridge Builder by Will Allen Dromgoole

**An old man, going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast, and deep, and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.**

**The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned, when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.**

**"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim, near,
"You are wasting strength with building here;**

**Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again will pass this way;
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide-
Why build you this bridge at the evening tide?"**

**The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today,
A youth, whose feet must pass this way.**

**This chasm, that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him."**

