

**MILITARY BRATS:  
A Living Study in Race Relations**

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Brats Without Borders**

**Abstract**

In 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, desegregating the United States military. Much has been written about the Order's effect on soldiers; almost none about the powerful effect it has had on generations of military children, who began living in the same neighborhoods and attending the same schools, churches, and playgrounds – twenty years before the Civil Rights Movement exploded. Racist speech was also prohibited and defiant children were immediately reported to their parent's commanding officer, who could reprimand or demote their parent. How did this shape the racial attitudes and identity of military children? How have they benefitted and what have been the biggest challenges transitioning out of the military? How might their experiences provide a window into possible solutions for other areas torn by racial strife? These are just a few of the questions "Military Brats: A Living Study in Race Relations" will discuss.

**Keywords:** military brats, integration, experiment, generational

Welcome to VA Tech's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual  
Veterans in Society Conference

**Panel 4: What is Veteran's Studies?**

**MILITARY BRATS:**

**A Living Study in Race Relations**

**Presenter:**

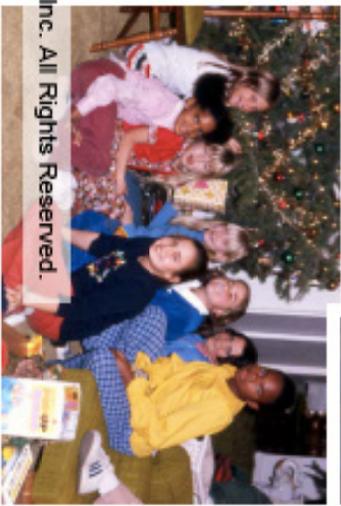
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**Executive Director, Brats Without Borders  
Army Brat & Writer/Director, BRAATS: Our Journey Home,  
The First Documentary About Growing Up Military**

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# Just Another Army Brat...



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# Executive Order 9981

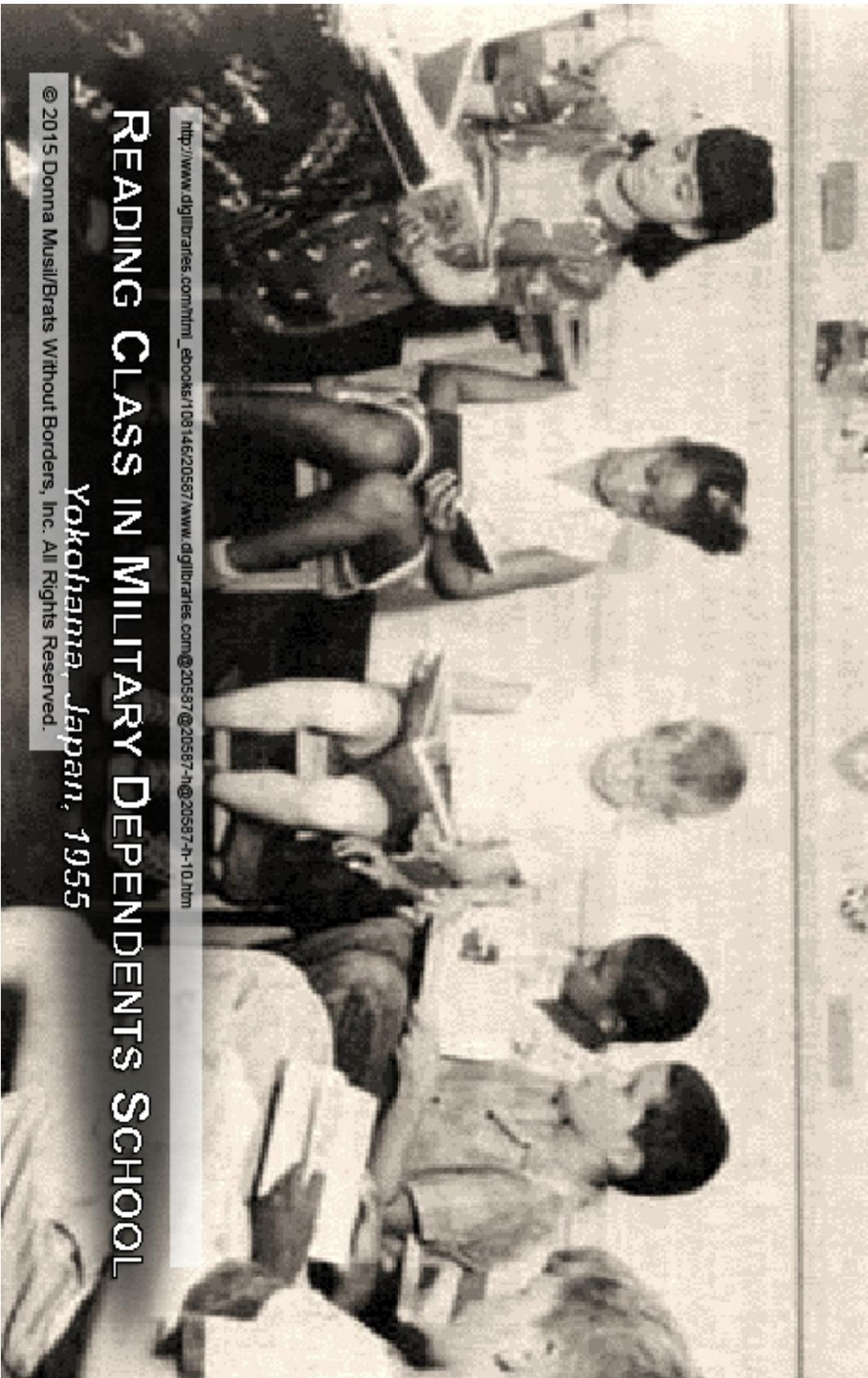
EXECUTIVE ORDER

*“... there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed forces without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”*



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## DOD Schools Act Quickly



[http://www.digitallibraries.com/html\\_ebooks/108146/20587/www.digitallibraries.com@20587-1-@20587-1-10.htm](http://www.digitallibraries.com/html_ebooks/108146/20587/www.digitallibraries.com@20587-1-@20587-1-10.htm)

**READING CLASS IN MILITARY DEPENDENTS SCHOOL**

*Yokohama, Japan, 1955*

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# “BRATS: Our Journey Home”

(BOJH\_RaceClips1\_102615\_w)

Video Transcript, excerpts from *BRATS: Our Journey Home*,  
written & directed by Donna Musil, narrated by Kris Kristofferson:

- o Morten Ender, Professor of Sociology, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, the United States Military Academy at West Point: *The military is the only place in American society where black people and Hispanic people routinely boss around white people.*
- o Valerie Anderson, Army Brat: *You were blue or you were green or you were khaki and you were American.*
- o General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Army Brat: *I never looked at someone as a black officer. I looked at them as an officer. I never looked at someone as a black soldier. I looked at them as a member of the Army, uh, and we were a team.*
- o Olga Ramos, Air Force Brat: *The other thing that is very unique, I think, to, to growing up on a military base is the fact that you don't have control over who your neighbors are. And it forced an integration in neighborhoods that really, even in the United States today, you don't see.*
- o George Junne, Chair, Africana Studies, University of Northern Colorado: *In the military, on those bases, when I was there, zero tolerance for race and racism. It didn't matter what you thought, you could not act on it. The soldiers could go out and have their little riots and do everything like that, but it better not be in the school system.*
- o Kris Kristofferson, Narrator: *This may be one of the reasons brats – forty percent of whom are minorities – routinely outscore their public school peers. Why three times as many of us get college degrees.*
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## Off-Base Was a Different Story



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*"I can remember their faces looking at me on the school bus. Why are you on the school bus of all white people? Why are you going to that school that I can't go to? That I live nearby? Why are you allowed to go places we can't go?"*

**Michelle Green, Air Force Brat,  
Daughter of Tuskegee Airman**

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(BOJH\_RaceClips2\_102815\_w)

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- o Kris Kristofferson, Narrator: *This does not mean we're not proud of our cultural heritage or don't want to explore it.*
- o George Junne: *I'm not trying to avoid race. I'm a black male. And so I'm not trying to say it's not important, because there's a lot of history and culture that's very important, ... at least for me and my family. But that's not the primary thing of who George Junne is. It's who am I? Am I a good person? Do I treat people well?*
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## Racist Speech Criminalized



Stateside military bases were “islands of integration in a sea of Jim Crow.”  
— Sociologist Charles Moskos

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# Decreased Intergenerational Racism

When I first went to Kaiserslautern High School, at noon time in the gym ... they had music that was playing. I'm sitting there eating my lunch... and I look up and there's this black guy and this white girl dancing. I said, 'Oh, my God!'

I got the doors lined up. I had a little pocket knife. Because when the stuff happens, I'm out of here... And the song went on, they danced, they sat down, and nothing happened.

© 2015 Donna Musil/Brats Without Borders, Inc. All Rights Reserved. That was 1958. - George Junne



# Brats of Color Outperform

## EDUCATION

### Why Are Students at Military Base Schools Out-Achieving Their Civilian Peers?

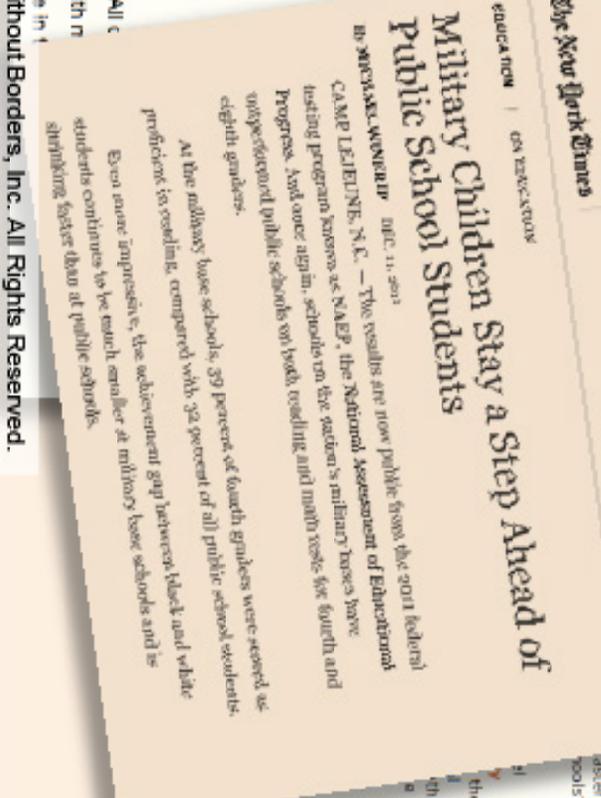
*Kids educated on military bases regularly outscore kids educated in public schools on national assessment tests. Is the model replicable?*

By [S.E. Smith / AlterNet](#)

December 12, 2011



If someone asked you to describe expected achievement scores in a student population where a) many have high personal debt with only a single parent at home; b) 40% of the school population is Latino or black; and c) students can expect to change schools between six and nine times as they move through primary and secondary school, "below average results" would probably come to mind. All c



### Military base schools outperforming public schools on tests—despite deemphasizing tests

by [Laura Clawson](#) for [Daily Kos Labor](#)

MON DEC 12, 2011 AT 01:12 PM PST

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standardized tests, which "are used as original measures and assess the effectiveness of the

setting students up for an uphill struggle in t

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✓ Don't presume racism...

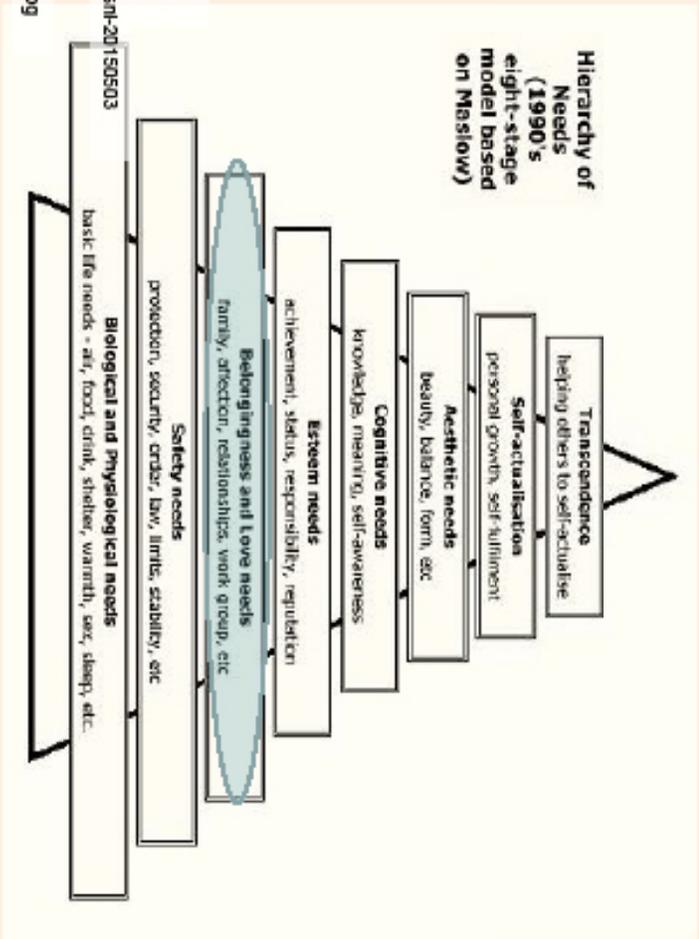
✓ Appreciate the bigger picture...

✓ Don't feel as limited by racial stereotypes...

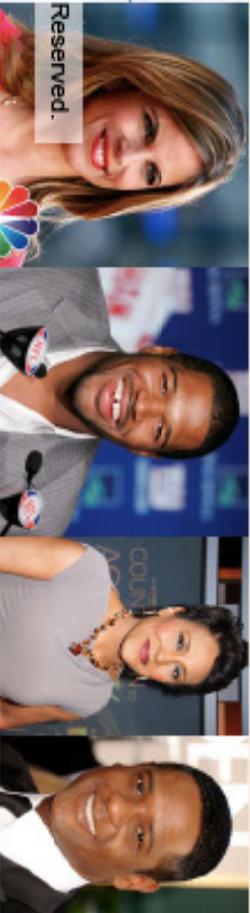
# Belonging Issues



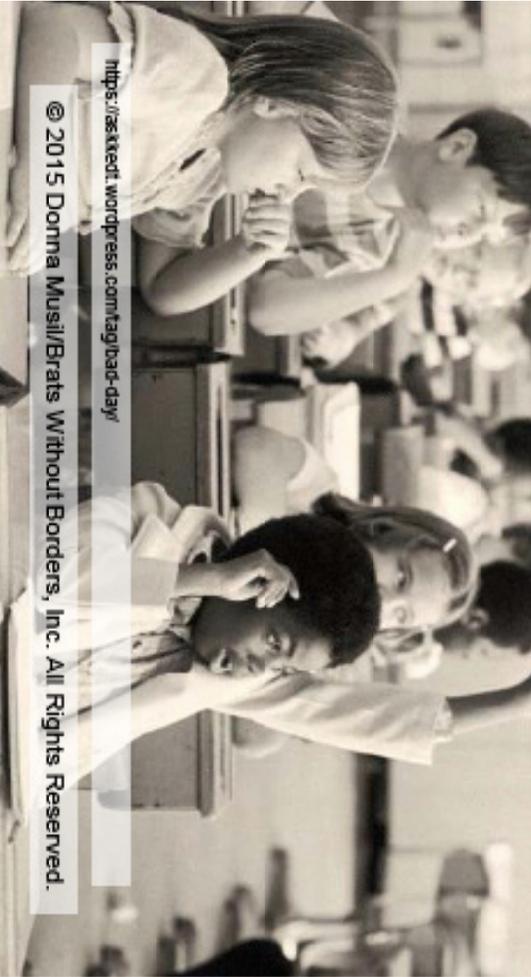
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<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/wiz-khalifa-brings-missy-see-you-again-to-em-201150503>  
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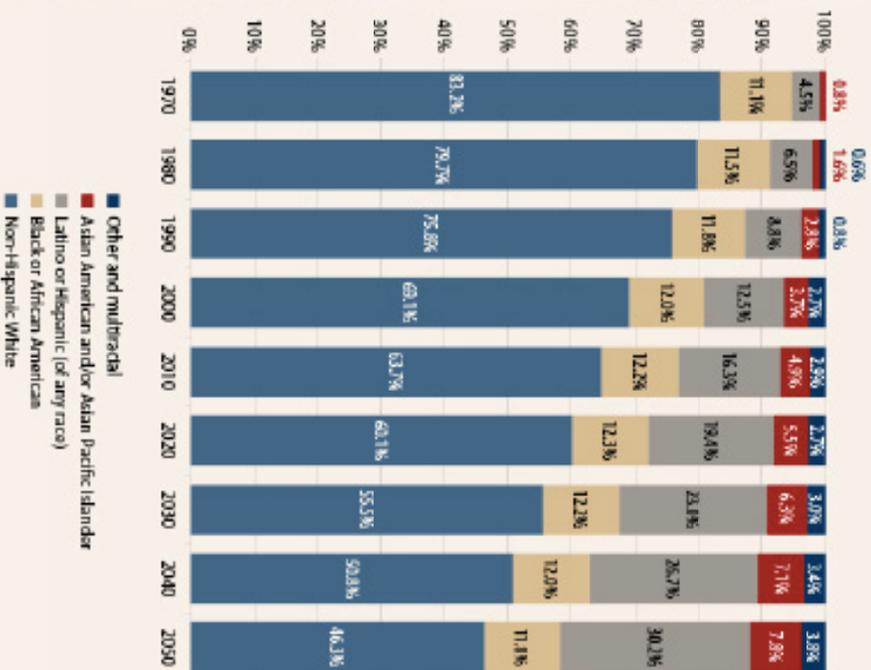
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# It Matters



The racial and ethnic composition of the United States, 1970–2050



Sources: Data for 1970 and 1980 from Statistical Abstract of the United States; Data for 1990, 2000, and 2010 from the U.S. Census Bureau; Data for 2020 through 2050 from the U.S. Census Bureau Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity (2008).

# A New Framework



# This ...

<http://nccamerica.com/2011/09/children-heart-organization-holds-priorities-of-peace-for-palestinians-and-israelis/>



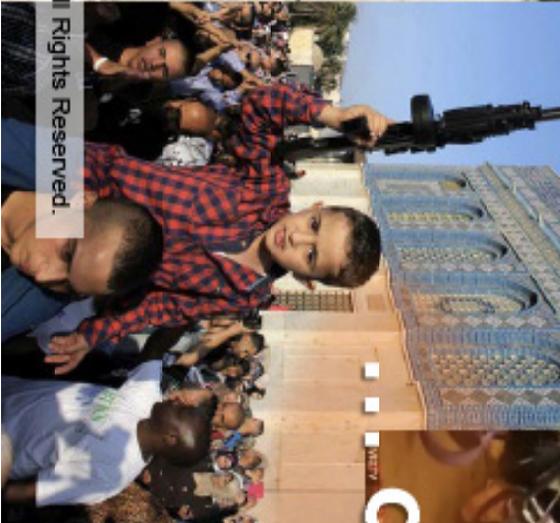
[http://www.ruffindignpost.com/luccas-bentop/peace-israelis-palestinians-humans\\_id\\_5628536.html](http://www.ruffindignpost.com/luccas-bentop/peace-israelis-palestinians-humans_id_5628536.html)

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/stories/shows/day-in-pics-july-28-2014/palestinian-children-hold-toy-guns-during-a-protest-in-jerusalem/slideshow/39165647.cms>



<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2372133/Joeseph-Crachiolas-photo-black-white-kids-hugging-goes-viral-Treyvon-Martin-verdict.html>

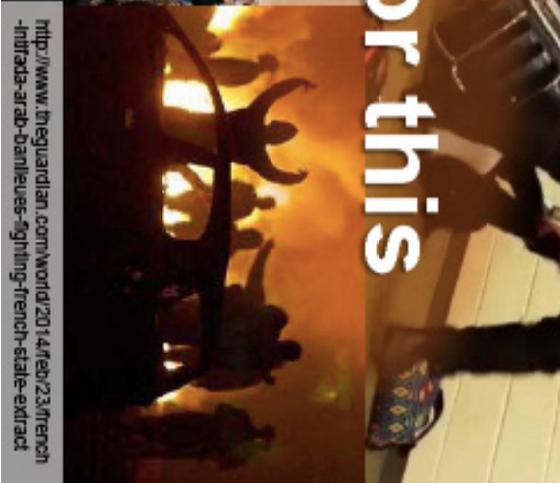
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# ... or this



<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/palestinian-statehood-feels-israelis-new-coalition-government-will-bury-the-possibility-of-a-two-10233858.html>



<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/23/french-intrada-arab-banlieues-fighting-french-state-extract>

# Major General Oliver W. Dillard



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**Nickname(s)**

"Ollie"

**Born**

September 28, 1926  
Margaret, Alabama, U.S.

**Died**

June 16, 2015  
Canton, Michigan, U.S.

**Allegiance**

United States of America

**Service/branch**

United States Army  
1945-1980

**Years of service**

1945-1980

**Rank**

Major General

**Commands held**

- First United States Army
- 2nd Armored Division
- 24th Infantry Regiment
- 4th Infantry Division
- MACV

**Battles/Wars**

- World War II
- Korean War
- Vietnam War

**Awards**

- Distinguished Service Medal (2)
- Silver Star
- Legion of Merit (3)
- Bronze Star (2) with "V" Device
- Purple Heart
- Air Medal
- Army Commendation Medal (2)
- Combat Infantry Badge
- 2nd Award

**Brats Without Borders thanks...**  
**Virginia Tech and all the Attendees at the**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Veterans in Society Conference...!**



**Donna Musil, JD, ABJ**  
Executive Director, Brats Without Borders  
Writer-Director, *BRATS: Our Journey Home*,  
*Our Own Private Battlefield*

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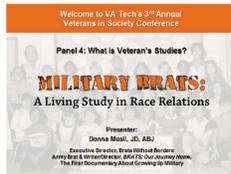
## MILITARY BRATS: A Living Study in Race Relations

Presented by Donna Musil, ED, BWB

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Veterans in Society Conference - VA Tech (11/12-14/15)

Fri, 11/13, Panel 4: What is Veterans Studies? (1:40-3:10 pm, 15 minutes)

### #1 – Intro Thanks



- Thank you – Jim Dubinsky, Marcia Davitt, Heidi Nobles, everyone at VA Tech – for inviting me to participate in another Veterans in Society Conference. It’s an honor to be here again.
- I will be talking today about a group of people who have been ignored in most discussions about race/diversity: Military Brats. They shouldn’t be. I believe they are a “Grand Experiment” in race relations. An experiment in which they inadvertently participated, and a beacon of hope for us all ... if we’d just pay attention.

### #2 – Just Another Army Brat



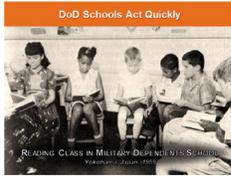
- I’m one of those brats. I spent the first sixteen years of my life moving twelve times across three continents. In 1976, when I was sixteen, my father died of service-related illnesses. Two weeks later, we moved to Columbus, Georgia, where I spent my senior year in a public school which had only been integrated for five years. You could feel the tension in the halls.
- Twenty years later, I reunited with classmates from a Department of Defense school in Taegu, Korea. Although we physically looked like Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition, I noticed that our experiences, insecurities, even our accents were like the cookie-cutter houses in which grew up. That’s when it occurred to me that Military Brats were a living study in race relations, but no one seemed to notice.

### #3 – Executive Order 9981



- On July 26, 1948, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, abolishing segregation in the Armed Forces. This was essentially eighty years after the Civil War, three years after World War II, and twenty years before the Civil Rights Movement.

## #4 – DoD Schools Act Quickly



- As expected, there was a lot of resistance – from Congress, the country, even the military. But in less than three years, all on-base DoD schools were integrated. Military children began living in the same neighborhoods, and going to the same schools, churches, and playgrounds. Here are few clips regarding race relations from the first feature-length documentary about growing up military, *BRATS: Our Journey Home*.
- **Video Transcript, excerpts from *BRATS: Our Journey Home*, written & directed by Donna Musil, narrated by Kris Kristofferson:**
  - **Morten Ender**, Professor of Sociology, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, the United States Military Academy at West Point: *The military is the only place in American society where black people and Hispanic people routinely boss around white people.*
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## #5 – Off-Base Was A Different Story



- Off-base was a different story. And it still is, in many respects. But Truman's Executive Order only applied to federal schools. At the time, there were approximately thirty thousand military brats going to segregated off-base schools.



- In 1954, of course, the Supreme Court ruled school segregation was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Bd of Education of Topeka*. But like my senior high school in Columbus, Georgia, many cities refused to comply. Michelle Green, the daughter of a Tuskegee Airman, was living on an Air Force base in Biloxi, Mississippi, in the mid-sixties. She and her sisters were the only African-American kids going to an off-base Catholic school. She had to ride a military school bus through poverty-stricken neighborhoods. As you can imagine, it was quite confusing. In fact, many brats have had difficulty interacting with civilian America about racial issues – as children and as adults. Here are some more clips from the *BRATS* film.
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## **#6 – Racist Speech Criminalized**



- One of main challenges replicating this Grand Experiment is the First Amendment – freedom of speech – which military families don't really have. On base, racist speech is criminalized. If a military teen is heard using racial epithets, it's reported both to his parents and their commanding officer. So most brats, including myself, grew up rarely hearing racist speech or experiencing racial divisions.

- This is a tough one. It goes to the heart of our democracy. But this experiment – and in other place like Germany after World War II – has shown that improving race relations may require some kind of speech restrictions.

## **#7 – Decrease Intergenerational Racism**



- In my opinion, the most significant outcomes of this Grand Experiment is that, with the right combination of the carrot and the stick – it looks like we may be able to decrease intergenerational racism in one generation.
- Why do I say that? Because this open view about race among military children has persisted, even while new families come into the system and bring their prejudices right along with them.
- Most presume that if a child is born with racist parents, the odds that that child will also become racist are high. But because on-base military families can't choose where they live or voice their bigotries in public, our research shows that it doesn't take long before the children begin siding more with their peers than their parents – even when their parents are privately racist. This extends to interracial dating, as well.

## **#8 – Brats of Color Outperform**



- The second most significant outcome of this Grand Experiment, in my opinion, is how well military brats of color have been succeeding, educationally. For years, military kids have been outperforming their civilian peers. Regardless of their parents' educational and financial background. Regardless of being raised by single parents. And seemingly in spite of multiple moves, deployments, and combat-related trauma.
- Some believe this is due to the military's emphasis on education. Others think DoD teachers are superior. I think Truman's Executive Order leveled the playing field and lifted the yoke of racism as much as any piece of legislation can. I think these children truly feel judged by the content of their character, rather than the color of their skin, and perform accordingly. Hopefully, one day Brats Without Borders can get the support we need to scientifically test this theory.

## **#9 – Other Benefits**



- All this living together... not constantly hearing racist speech... moving internationally... seems to have changed the way military brats look at the world. They don't presume racism as quickly, even when people *are* being racist! They appreciate the bigger picture, especially if they've lived overseas. They've seen all kinds of people living in poverty. They've been outsiders for reasons other than race. They feel less limited by racial expectations and stereotypes.

- As one non-brat said in Mary Edwards Wertsch's book, *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*, minority brats seem to have a "different tape playing" in their heads; a tape full of positive feelings and self-esteem that is less daunted by racism.

## **#10 – Belonging Issues**



- Of course, it's not all happy and rosy. There are bigoted brats, but they do seem to be the minority. The biggest challenge – for all brats – seems to be "fitting in" racially if and when they leave the military. Often, they don't – with their civilian friends, their extended family, sometimes even their own parents (especially if those parents didn't grow up military themselves).
- This can make a brat feel very alone – and for good reason. According to Abraham Maslow, "belonging" is the third most important human need. Only food and safety are more important. A human being actually needs belonging more than they need self-esteem. And lack of belonging can lead to depression, drugs, even suicide.
- What's frustrating is that brats in power don't raise awareness of these issues. I'm not sure why. Perhaps, because of all the moves, we don't know how to build community. Perhaps some don't know the Military Brat Culture exists. The military doesn't teach it. Non-military-brat parents don't teach it. Some groups purporting to support military children actually seem to advocate against it. Maybe some of these powerful brats feel their success is due more to their specialness than their military brat background. Who knows? Whatever the reason, we don't support each other in the way I wish we would. Maybe in time, that will change. I hope so.

## **#11 – It Matters**



- Why does all this matter? It's obvious. Racism, xenophobia, fear of the unknown... is killing people. Another reality we might want to heed is this: demographics are shifting and people have long memories. But most of all, I think it matters because racism is a huge waste of human potential. We need *all* children to be the best they can be, regardless of their race, creed, or color.

## **#12 – A New Framework**



- We need a new framework for fighting racism. It's ironic, an institution formed to kill is also teaching people how to get along. I think Truman's Executive Order 9981 is teaching lessons we're not hearing. I remember listening to a French minister on *Charlie Rose* discussing the Muslim teenagers who set fires across Paris a few years ago. The more he talked, the more I realized they were TCKs, Third Culture Kids. Like brats, they didn't fit. They were caught between worlds. They were trying to find a place to belong.

- What if we took this military model and transferred it to Jerusalem? Built a neighborhood and filled it with half Palestinians and half Israelis. Gave every family a house and a job. And like military bases, had one school, one playground, and one church, where different services were held at different times. Impose two conditions. One, no racist speech. Two, they're assigned a house. If they break the rules, they lose that house. How long do you think it would take for those children in those families to start thinking differently than their parents?
- Perhaps I'm being idealistic. Perhaps I'm being naïve. Perhaps. But considering the state this world is in – isn't it worth a shot?

### **#13 – Major General Oliver Dillard**



- I'd like to dedicate this presentation to the late Major General Oliver W. Dillard, who died last earlier this year in June at eighty-eight years old. Major Dillard was the fifth African-American general in the United States Army, where he served for thirty-four years. General Dillard was a combat veteran in both Korea and Vietnam, and served in both the segregated and integrated armies. He had a lot to say about this topic. He and family will be featured in my new documentary, *Truman's Kids*.
- I wish he could be here with us today. His daughter, Diane, is here, along with Lora Beldon, Director of the Military Kid Art Project. We're all working together on the first Military BRAT Art Camp, with Virginia Tech's Jim Dubinsky and Heidi Nobles.

### **#14 – Thank You**



- Thank you for listening. I'm in the early stages of making a documentary about this subject, *Truman's Kids*. If like to help or join our efforts, please let me know. Thank you!