

REPRESENT

What Americans Can Do to Address Bias and Structural Racism in the U.S. Foreign Affairs and National Security Workforce OCTOBER 2020

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Represent is a series from the CSIS International Security Program on diversity, inclusion, and representation in national security. In Part II of a two-part article for the series, Tony Johnson offers ideas to address structural racism and bias in America's national security workforce.

In my last piece I argued that structural racism is a significant threat to our democratic way of life and a crippling force on U.S. foreign policy and national security. In this article, I will offer some ideas for how I think structural racism and bias in America's national security workforce can be addressed. I acknowledge that the problems I outlined in Part I are deeply-rooted and complex issues in our society. I offer these ideas in a spirit of friendship and with the hope that it will inspire people to think and take productive steps that lead to positive change.

BIG PICTURE APPROACHES

At the highest levels, our nation needs to [reinvigorate civic education](#). Americans of all backgrounds have [lost touch with](#) and confidence in their government. Few know how government works, should work, or how they can [participate in the decisions](#) that shape the quality of our daily lives. At the high end of foreign affairs and national security, that lack of knowledge and confidence translates into confusion and apathy. The consequence of the disconnect is that public service, particularly in the fields of foreign policy and national security, has become the privileged province of a few when it is meant to be the concern and responsibility of all Americans.

We must not only ensure that civic education reaches communities where people of color live, but broaden the scope of that education. If it focuses only on domestic issues and fails to address the role of the United States in the wider world, there will be downstream implications for the representation and participation of people of color in foreign policy decisionmaking. [Programs](#) like the [American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation](#), the [American Legion Auxiliary Girls State](#), and [Model United Nations](#) should strive for greater inclusion.

Military service brings Americans from all geographies and backgrounds together in common cause: to defend of our nation. In many ways the military is a model meritocracy, and things continue to progress. But, to maintain positive momentum, [improvements are needed in key areas](#), like assignments, promotions, and retention. In addition, the system and distribution of [ROTC and JROTC programs](#) needs a [refresh](#). ROTC programs are often the first contact that

minority youth have with the military, and those programs train future citizen-soldiers and leaders. As a product of both programs I can attest to the important influence ROTC had in helping me decide my future, and in opening my mind to possibilities of a career in national security. It is important that those programs do better to attract and mentor young people of color who will lead future airmen, sailors, soldiers, and Marines.

[Internships](#) in Congress, government, and at think tanks are often out of reach to American students of color for a [range of reasons](#). Often, students of color are only vaguely aware that such opportunities exist — let alone how to access the programs — and generally, low-income students cannot afford [unpaid internships](#). The opportunities and funding in this space can be expanded and recruitment for these programs could be more inclusive. A quick scan of a website that promotes [internship programs for minority students](#) showed no programs for foreign affairs and national security. That is problematic for the future of the national security workforce.

On top of expanding the opportunities for Americans of color to join the ranks of the national security workforce, further structural changes are necessary. We must change the paradigm that draws America's national security workforce from only the most elite schools. I say this as a product of that system. But I believe the change we seek will come too slowly (or never) if we do not invest in the development of robust national security programs at the academic institutions that educate the highest numbers of Americans of color. The revolution in the national security workforce we seek is within our power to produce if we choose to invest in it now. So, fund the creation of foreign affairs departments, faculty and teaching fellowships for national security professionals at Historically Black Colleges and Universities ([HBCUs](#)), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions ([HSIs](#)), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). We need an academic system that will produce the workforce we want and need.

To my White colleagues in the U.S. foreign policy and national security establishment, there are actions you can take to proactively support the change our nation needs:

- If you have hiring and promotion authority, hire people of color and promote them to key leadership roles. Pay them WELL. Make their career and professional development a priority. Get them help if you see them struggling in a particular aspect of the work. Put them on high level teams in the room with senior company leaders every chance you get. Seek out their ideas and insist that they have an active voice in your organization's important decisions.
- People of color often don't have the social networks that you do; reach into your network to create opportunities for your Black and Brown colleagues. Broker personal introductions to other senior-placed people you know. Invite and sponsor us to join professional associations, be a mentor and partner to a person of color, co-write papers, and invite people of color to speak on panels and give conference talks.
- Get to know people of color who work alongside you every day – the whole person, not just the cutout who works to fit in because s/he fears the company culture won't get them. Make a point of getting to know their skills, personal stories, aspirations, and concerns. Ask them what they think about tough problems and what you can do to be a better ally in working toward solutions.

For people of color: I'm not waiting to be invited to America's foreign policy and national security dialogue, and neither should you. Here are a few pieces of advice I can offer based on my years of experience:

- If you're a new or mid-career professional, looking with trepidation at the indignities endured by national security professionals who took up public service careers before you, don't be deterred. Drive on. Help is

on the way. The “[2020 Represent America Abroad Act](#),” and the “[Globally Black](#)” initiatives are designed to increase diversity in foreign affairs careers. In the meantime, your determination to succeed will make you stronger and our country safer.

- If you’re an [academic](#) with big ideas for making American defense and foreign policy [better and stronger](#), storm the gates of the journals and think tanks. Write. Take a university fellowship or faculty position and teach. Use your intellect, cultural perspectives, and experience to shape U.S. security policy that is true to our shared history and worthy of our trust. Shape the young minds of students who will become the nation’s future leaders.
- If you’re a university undergrad or graduate student who’s wondered what’s next and what you can do to make a difference in a country that is tearing itself apart and a world that has seemingly gone crazy, get involved in anything and everything to do with [foreign affairs](#).
- If you see yourself as a leader, suit up for [public service](#) in national security. Add your strength to the [intelligence community](#), [military](#), or [law enforcement](#) agencies at the [federal](#) and [local level](#). Be unapologetic in demanding your voice be heard on issues of U.S. foreign policy and national security, as well as domestic policy.

I know some of these options are hard asks right now, especially when so many have already given so much to this cause. But if we want to be heard in the halls of power, then we must continue to be change-agents that make it happen.

CONCLUSION

I welcome all allies in the fight against bigotry and hatred in all its forms and masks. It’s important to do more than passively acknowledge the problem and have “[conversations](#).” That isn’t enough to change the status quo. Professionals of color working in the U.S. foreign affairs and national security communities need their White colleagues to be proactive and intentional about inclusion, be interested in their views, and to extend a hand of friendship. It’s ok to not have answers to the all the problems of systemic bias and structural racism at your fingertips. Nobody does. Just be interested, ask questions, actively listen, and hear the whole person. Then take actions that demonstrate support for Black and Brown colleagues. Actions, more than words, will lead to change.

We are at an inflection point in American history that will determine the future course and character of our nation. If you take nothing else from this article, consider this: Diversity is America’s great strength. Our national security depends on it.

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Anthony “Tony” Johnson is the Strategic Red Team Chief in the Joint Advanced Warfighting Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses. A 20-year veteran of the national security field, Tony specializes in U.S. special operations and Irregular Warfare policy, Defense Institution Building, and Security Sector Assistance. His expertise and experience include defense strategy and policy, operations planning and military capabilities assessments, Joint Forces concept development and experimentation.

Tony began his career as a U.S. Navy Officer, serving on the staff of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, and in Direct Support signals intelligence Units of the U.S. 6th Fleet. Since then he has served in a number of national security roles, including DoD Advisor and U.S. Security Governance Initiative Country Team Director for Ghana and Niger at the U.S. Department of State (2015-2017), Advisor for Special Operations and Irregular Warfare in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (2011-2013), Deputy Chief of Staff to the Director for Technology Transition at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, as well as a policy and research advisor to the Defense Science Board (2006-2008). In addition, Tony has led multidisciplinary teams serving nondefense agencies of the U.S. federal government, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of the Treasury, U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Tony is a passionate advocate of greater diversity and inclusion in the U.S. foreign and national security policy communities. He is a dedicated mentor to young people who look to build careers in public service – civilian and military. Tony joined the Truman National Security Project in 2013. He co-founded the TruDiversity Initiative, a community of Truman members who are champions of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the U.S. foreign policy and national security profession.

Tony holds an M.A. in International Security Studies from Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service, and a B.A. from Norwich University. He is currently pursuing postgraduate studies in Public Policy and Leadership in the Executive Education Program at the Harvard Kennedy School. Tony is a 2016 Institute for Defense Analyses Scholar, and a 2012 Aspen Ideas Festival Scholar, and Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Fellows for the College of Liberal Arts at Norwich University. In December 2018, Tony was honored as one of 35 [Black American National Security & Foreign Policy Next Generation Leaders](#) “making a difference in the national security sector” by the Diversity in National Security Network; and in April 2020 he was invited to join the Advisory Council of the Global Special Operations Forces Foundation.

Tony grew up in Las Vegas, NV. He currently lives in Washington, DC with his husband, Juan.

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