

RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties
From: American Accountability Foundation Research Staff
Date: June 20, 2023
Re: General C.Q. Brown is Making the Air Force Woke

General Charles Q. “C.Q.” Brown, Jr. is the current chief of staff of the Air Force, the senior uniformed Air Force officer in charge of over 685,000 active-duty, Guard, Reserve, and civilian forces in the US and abroad. Brown also serves as a military adviser to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Council, and the President as part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Biden recently nominated General Brown to be the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

General Brown is a driving force in the effort to make our nation’s military “woke” – repeatedly pushing discussion of racial grievances and new efforts in the Air Force to bring diversity to its ranks.

General Brown has:

- Questioned whether non-black airmen view racism as a problem.
- Said that the Air Force needs to “tweak the screening process, so it’s not so reliant upon a paper test” when considering recruitment and promotion opportunities.
- Said “the beauty of” George Floyd’s death is that it forced the air force to take a “hard look at ourselves.”
- Said “you’ve got to look at the demographics of our country, how it's changing. If you have that approach [of opposing inclusivity efforts] you're gonna have very few people that come serve.”
- Said “I hire for diversity” for his senior leadership team and front office.
- Questioned whether certain patches, mottos, or coins need “to be changed to be more inclusive of the Force.”
- Wants to review recruits’ social media to learn “a little bit about the character of the individual that you’re bringing into our service.”
- Noted a “pendulum swing” when comparing police response to Black Lives Matter in the summer of 2020 versus police response on January 6th.

REACTING TO THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD, GENERAL BROWN QUESTIONED WHETHER NON-BLACK AIRMEN VIEW RACISM AS A PROBLEM

On June 5, 2020, General Brown made a video in response to George Floyd’s death. In the video, General Brown shared his personal encounters with prejudice and delved into racially sensitive topics. Perhaps most troublingly, General Brown questioned



whether non-black airmen view racism as a problem, stating that “I’m thinking about how these Airmen view racism, whether they don’t see it as a problem since it doesn’t happen to them or whether they’re empathetic”:¹

Here’s what I’m thinking about.

I’m thinking about how full I am with emotion not just for George Floyd, but the many African-Americans that have suffered the same fate as George Floyd.

I’m thinking about protests in “my country tis of thee, sweet land of liberty”, the equality expressed in our Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution that I’ve sworn my adult life to support and defend.

I’m thinking about a history of racial issues and my own experiences that didn’t always sing of liberty and equality.

I’m thinking about living in two worlds, each with their own perspective and views.

I’m thinking about my sister and I being the only African-Americans in our entire elementary school and trying to fit in.

I’m thinking about then going to a high school where roughly half the students were African-American and trying to fit in.

I’m thinking about my Air Force career where I was often the only African-American in my squadron or as a senior officer, the only African-American in the room.

I’m thinking about wearing the same flight suit with the same wings on my chest as my peers and then being questioned by another military member, “...are you a pilot?”

I’m thinking about how I sometimes felt that my comments were perceived to represent the African-Americans’ perspective, when it was just my perspective informed by being African-American.

I’m thinking about some of the insensitive comments made without awareness by others.

I’m thinking about being a captain at the O’Club with my squadron and being told by other African-Americans that I wasn’t “black enough” since I was spending more time with my squadron than with them.

I’m thinking about my mentors, and how I rarely had a mentor that looked like me.

I’m thinking about the sound advice that has led to my success and even so, most of my mentors could not relate to my experience as an African-American.

I’m thinking about the pressure I’ve felt to perform error-free especially for supervisors I perceived had expected less from me as an African-American.

¹ Pacific Air Force "Here’s what I’m thinking about" [June 5, 2020](#)



I'm thinking about having to represent by working twice as hard to prove their expectations and perceptions of African-Americans were invalid.

I'm thinking about the Airmen that have lived through similar experiences and feelings as mine or who were, either consciously or unconsciously, unfairly treated.

Conversely, I'm thinking about the Airmen who don't have a life similar to mine and don't have to navigate through two worlds.

I'm thinking about how these Airmen view racism, whether they don't see it as a problem since it doesn't happen to them or whether they're empathetic.

I'm thinking about our two sons and how we've had to prepare them to live in two worlds.

I'm thinking about the frank and emotional conversations my wife and I have had with them just this past week as we discussed the situations that have led to the protests around our country.

Finally, I'm thinking about my historic nomination to be the first African-American to serve as the Air Force Chief of Staff.

I'm thinking about the African-Americans that went before me to make this opportunity possible.

I'm thinking about the immense expectations that come with this historic nomination, particularly through the lens of the current events plaguing our Nation.

I'm thinking about how I may have fallen short in my career and will likely continue falling short of living up to all those expectations.

I'm thinking about how my nomination provides some hope, but also comes with a heavy burden—I can't fix centuries of racism in our country, nor can I fix decades of discrimination that may have impacted members of our Air Force.

I'm thinking about how I can make improvements, personally, professionally, and institutionally, so that all Airmen, both today and tomorrow, appreciate the value of diversity and can serve in an environment where they can reach their full potential.

I'm thinking I don't have all the answers on how to create such an environment whether here in PACAF or across our Air Force.

I'm thinking about without clear-cut answers, I just want to have the wisdom and knowledge to lead during difficult times like these.

I want the wisdom and knowledge to lead, participate in, and listen to necessary conversations on racism, diversity, and inclusion.

I want the wisdom and knowledge to lead those willing to take committed and sustained action to make our Air Force better.

That's what I'm thinking about. I wonder what you're thinking about. I want to hear what you're thinking about, and how together we can make a difference.



General Brown’s video highlights how he views many issues through a racial lens. Further, Brown questioning whether non-black airmen view racism as a problem is divisive and could undermine the trust of non-black airmen in the Air Force – perhaps causing non-black airmen to question whether General Brown views them as racists.

General Brown Wants to “Tweak the Screening Process, So It’s Not So Reliant Upon a Paper Test”

In an interview with *PEOPLE Magazine* published on February 11, 2021, General Brown said that his video reacting to the death of George Floyd was eye-opening for his colleagues and friends who are white. Further, General Brown said in the interview that “we’ve got to closely manage our diverse populations” and “tweak the screening process, so it’s not so reliant upon a paper test”:²

...Some of my mentors and friends who are white, while I wouldn't say they didn't have any idea, the video was really an eye-opening experience for them. And one thing that happened over the course of the summer is that conversation blossomed, and we began talking about things in a much deeper sense than we ever have. We have a chance to move further forward, and I really see this as an opportunity we've got to take advantage of, so that we don't let the door close on us due to a lack of action.

*Moving forward, we've got to closely manage our diverse populations, and we've got to actually take a look at the diverse population that comes into our force to make sure their development and opportunities aren't happening just by luck. We need to make sure that we actually have a broader group of candidates to choose from as we go forth, and that we expose some of these young people to certain opportunities they might not be able to afford, such as youth flight academies, **as well as tweak the screening process, so it's not so reliant upon a paper test**...*

General Brown Said “The Beauty Of” George Floyd’s Death is that it Forced the Air Force to take a “Hard Look at Ourselves”

In an interview with *PBS News Hour*, published on July 28, 2021, General Brown continued to talk about the effects the death of George Floyd had on the Air Force. General Brown was asked by PBS interviewer Nick Schifrin whether the military needs to break up a “white boys club,” to which General Brown responded that military needs to make sure that they have a “diverse slate of candidates” during interviews. Additionally, General Brown said that “the beauty of” of the death of George Floyd is that it has caused the Air Force to take a hard look at itself:³

² People "Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Brown Jr. Opens Up About Emotional Talks on Race with His Sons" [February 11, 2021](#)

³³ PBS "Gen. Brown on extremism in the Air Force and threats from China, Afghanistan" [July 28, 2021](#)



Nick Schifrin: So, let's talk about solutions.

I talked to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen, retired chairman, who uses a phrase ducks hire ducks, meaning white officers would elevate other white officers. Is one of the solutions essentially breaking a white boys club?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown: Well, part of the solution is actually having to first slate of candidates. When you look at any one of our positions where we're doing interviews is, you want to have a diverse slate of candidates.

And it does two things. It introduces you to somebody you may not already know. The second thing it does, it prepares that individual for future interviews

Nick Schifrin: You sense any resistance to that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown: No.

By and large, I think many of our airmen and our leaders, and our senior leaders in particular, they get it. And I think it's — in some cases, it may have been a blind spot for us, where we weren't really paying attention to it.

I think the beauty of — you know, as tragic as George Ford's death is and the other events that surround that, the fact that we're taking a hard look at ourselves, and I think it's opened some eyes to some of our airmen who were just — they just weren't — they were unconscious to it, in some aspects.

BRINGING DIVERSITY TO THE AIR FORCE

In an interview with the *Washington Post* that was streamed on YouTube on January 25, 2021, General Brown, acknowledged the accuracy of a PBS report that found a lack of diversity among Air Force officers. Brown also said that the Air Force is addressing this issue by breaking up promotion boards into developmental categories, ensuring diversity on the boards and on the candidate list, and understanding why people stay or leave the Air Force. General Brown also said that it is important that the Air Force “actually nudge and pull and actually purposely manage to ensure that we have diverse candidates that can compete”:⁴

*(18:11) Yeah, David, I did see that PBS report, and you know, there is accuracy to that report, and that's one of the things we found in our review that we did over the course of the summer. The way we address this is by purposeful management and leadership. And there are a couple of things we've already done inside the Air Force, particularly on the officer side. **We broke up our promotion boards to actually do developmental categories, so it wasn't kind of about a big one-size-fits-all by and large, and that gives us a better little better chance to work some of the talent management aspects. The other things that we have to do is ensure that we have diversity on the boards, but also diversity on the candidate list. And that's something***

⁴ YouTube, Air Force chief of staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. on racial injustice, AI in air combat and China [January 25, 2021](#)



we have been doing, but I don't know that we've been doing as purposeful as we probably could and as purposeful as we plan to do. And so, you know the aspect particularly you have... you know, builds a big foundation. So it's, you know, we're very hierarchical organizations. You need to have a big foundation coming in at the entry level, and then you got to sustain that over time to ensure that you have individuals of diverse backgrounds available as you get to more senior ranks. And so that's one thing we're focused on, to ensure we understand why people stay, why people leave. But also, as we look at our different lists and different panels of boards, we actually ensure that we have diverse candidates on the list. And the last thing I would say on that is how we encourage and mentor some of those diverse candidates because sometimes they may feel like they're not qualified to put their name in, and we've got to actually nudge and pull and actually purposely manage to ensure that we have diverse candidates that can compete. And if they need some help in certain areas with coaching or additional training or additional opportunities, that is something we've got to continue to work on as well. So it's really about providing those opportunities and the mentorship and the nurturing to ensure that all of our service members have the opportunity to compete on a level playing field.

In a video uploaded to YouTube by the channel of the Kunsan Air Base in South Korea in June 2021, General Brown discussed his efforts to promote diversity and inclusion within the Air Force. General Brown underscored the measures he has introduced to foster a more inclusive and diverse military force.⁵

(0:52) "Over the course of the last year, our Air Force has made great strides in reviewing and improving our diversity and inclusion policies and practices, and we will keep working to remove barriers, reduce biases, and ensure equity for all Airmen. But we also know that the greatest diversity and inclusion progress will come from within the units, not from the higher headquarters, within the squadrons and wings, the units we belong to. That is where we can do the most good right now, and the Wolfpack is no exception. That's why I'm so excited to join you for your Diversity and Inclusion Day."

(2:47) "Enhancing diversity and inclusion Air Force-wide will take time, but there are things we can do right now. Two important aspects both reinforced during my tours at Kunsan and throughout my Air Force career: one is the environment and culture within a unit; the second is how we take care of each other. Environment, culture, and how we treat each other, those are things that create a cohesive team where you know that you belong. During your remote tour, you may meet and learn about people that you would not otherwise get to know. You have the benefit of that shared experience, that common bond that comes with knowing, "This is my team, this is my squadron, this is my group, this is my wing. We all belong here together."

(4:07) "So, thank you once again for inviting me into your Diversity and Inclusion Day. I'm proud to have served in the Wolfpack, and I'm grateful for all of you for having the character to address diversity inclusion head-on, for making your units, our Air Force, the place where everyone knows that they belong and that here with us, they

⁵ YouTube " Gen. Brown Diversity & Inclusion Video" [June 10, 2021](#)



can reach their full potential, not by changing who they are, but by being who they are."

Further, *Defense One* reported in a February 2022 article that General Brown said "you've got to look at the demographics of our country, and how it's changing" when considering inclusivity efforts:⁶

...Brown said the issues must be addressed if the military is going to be able to attract men and women to fight those wars.

"If we don't think about this, we're not going to have anybody who is going to join our service to go fight China or Russia," Brown said. "And you've got to look at the demographics of our country, how it's changing. If you have that approach [of opposing inclusivity efforts] you're gonna have very few people that come serve."...

This discourse could raise concerns for some that General Brown is prioritizing creating a "woke" Air Force, seemingly focusing more on sociopolitical trends, rather than on building a robust and efficient military.

General Brown: "I Hire for Diversity"

In an interview with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in November 2020, General Brown stated that "I hire for diversity":⁷

General Brown (18:37): *I purposely build my office, my front office, and my team with diverse and I hire for diversity because they all bring a different perspective, which makes my decisions that much better because I hear different sides of the argument. Because they all see it differently. You know, they're not African-American, I'm not female. I mean, there's, I'm not female, I'm not Asian-American. But hearing from all these different groups provides a perspective, 'Oh yeah, I didn't think about that part.' And it makes us stronger as an Air Force. And I think it makes us stronger as a nation as well.*

General Brown also noted in the same Chicago Council on Global Affairs interview that "now it's almost like they got to be on the slate and be considered":

General Brown (16:55): *And then the next thing I see is when you're having discussions, even at the senior level, you're starting to make decisions about key personnel decisions, the discussion on diversity is much more forefront than it was. Almost like, uh, in some cases in the past when you talk about diversity, it was folks were afraid to bring it up that you didn't have a slate of diverse candidates or there*

⁶ Defense One, "Inside the Air Force Chief's Mission for Racial Equity," [February 19, 2022](#)

⁷ YouTube, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "Gen. Brown on the Air Force, Equity, and Inclusion," [November 18, 2020](#)



wasn't an African-American, Asian-American, a woman on the slate. Now it's almost like they got to be on the slate and be considered. And so I, I think as an institution and as a nation, we are more apt to talk about diversity more so than we have in the past. Now, we gotta get past talk, though, as well. It's what we do and it's how we actually bring and place individuals and give them the opportunity."

General Brown Questioned Whether Certain Patches, Mottos, or Coins Need “To Be Changed to Be More Inclusive of the Force”

During an interview with the *Washington Post* streamed on YouTube in January 2021, General Brown said that he has seen instances of unconscious bias in the Air Force, where people have used symbols or language that may have been acceptable in the past but are now seen as exclusionary. Brown was questioned by David Ignatius as to whether “some of those nicknames, mottos, whatever, had a negative and derogatory effect,” to which General Brown responded “there’s things that we’ve put in place, whether it’s a patch, a coin, a motto that may have been okay or been accepted in the past” but after a review implemented by General Brown may have been “something that needs to be changed to be more inclusive of the Force”:⁸

David Ignatius (20:20): *Final question, General Brown, in this area. On December 23, you issued a directive to conduct a comprehensive review of official and unofficial unit emblems, morale patches, mottos, nicknames, coins, all that other sort of descriptive that the Air Force has to ensure that these were helping to produce an inclusive and professional environment. What concerned you that led you to issue that directive? Did you find that some of those nicknames, mottos, whatever, had a negative and derogatory effect?*

General Brown (21:10): *Well, I've seen, actually, I'll tell you, David, I've seen this kind of particularly in leadership over the course of my career. I'd say probably the back half of the career, where there's things that we've had put in place, whether it's a patch, a coin, a motto, that may have been okay or been accepted in the past. But over time, as you start to open the aperture and start talking about disparity and being more inclusive, that you can't eliminate different parts of the organization or the Air Force if we're not conscious of it. And this goes into kind of the unconscious bias. And so, from that aspect, it was an opportunity for us to take a hard look at some of these areas that, you know, we really haven't maybe looked at in the past. And really, it may have bothered somebody, but they felt like nothing was going to be done about it. And so, in this case, it's an opportunity for us to take a look at it and actually do a hard review for ourselves and then take the appropriate action, whether we continue with the patch, the motto, the coin, or if it's something that needs to be changed to be more inclusive of the Force. And so, that's what drove this review.*

⁸ YouTube, Air Force chief of staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. on racial injustice, AI in air combat and China [January 25, 2021](#)



GENERAL BROWN WANTS TO REVIEW RECRUITS SOCIAL MEDIA TO LEARN “A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF THE INDIVIDUAL THAT YOU’RE BRINGING INTO OUR SERVICE”

In an interview with PBS published on July 28, 2021, General Brown emphasized the importance of reviewing a recruit's social media content, highlighting how it can provide valuable insights into an individual's “character”:⁹

Nick Schifrin: *Let's move to extremism.*

The Pentagon's finalizing a report right now that will go into extremism in the ranks and also among veterans and what the military can do with — do about it. And part of that is defining the problem, defining what is extremism.

How important do you think it is that the military decide that members of white supremacist groups and other extremist organizations are banned from being in the military?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown: *Those that don't live up to our core values of integrity, service, and excellence, those that don't stand up and hold themselves to the oath of office they take to the Constitution, those are the ones that we don't need in our military.*

Nick Schifrin: *It sounds like you're saying, yes, membership should not be allowed.*

Gen. Charles Q. Brown: *Well, membership of an extremist organization that goes against our core values, that goes against your oath is not what we need in our military.*

Nick Schifrin: *On recruitment, should recruits' social media be looked at to find extremist tendencies?*

Gen. Charles Q. Brown: *My concern is that individuals will put things on social media that they would never say to your face, OK, and that, to me, is an indicator.*

And that's why being able to take a look at social media will also tell you a little bit about the character of the individual that you're bringing into our service.

Nick Schifrin: *Meaning it should be disqualifying if someone is using social media to express views that they're not willing to say to your face?*

Gen. Charles Q. Brown: *Well, it should be considered.*

Whether it's — and as we work through the policy to determine how that plays out exactly, I think it is a factor that we want to take a look at and consider.

While it is important to keep legitimately bad actors out of the military, Brown's suggestion to review the social media of recruits raises serious questions as to who

⁹ PBS "Gen. Brown on extremism in the Air Force and threats from China, Afghanistan" [July 28, 2021](#)



will be adjudicating these reviews and what factors will be considered during the review to prevent the reviews from becoming a tool to exclude individuals with certain political beliefs from military service.

GENERAL BROWN NOTED A “PENDULUM SWING” WHEN COMPARING POLICE RESPONSE TO BLACK LIVES MATTER VERSUS POLICE RESPONSE ON JANUARY 6TH

During an interview with the Washington Post streamed on YouTube in January 2021 General Brown noted that race may have played a factor in how Capitol Police and other law enforcement responded to the events of January 6th versus how police responded to Black Lives Matter in the summer of 2020.¹⁰

***David Ignatius (04:30):** one more question, General Brown, about January 6. In the aftermath there were some commentators, some prominent political leaders, who said that they thought that the reaction by the Capitol Police and by police law enforcement, the National Guard, was conditioned in fact in part by the fact that the protesters were mostly white. That if this had been a Black Lives Matter protest, as last summer you would have seen a much harsher response. Do you think that issue of racial disparity and treatment is a factor here?*

***General Brown (05:09):** I think it's something that needs to be considered. But I also think it's a pendulum. You take a look at the, and I was not in Washington, DC in the summer when the protests happened here in DC. But there was a pendulum swing of the reaction then, and I think in this case the pendulum swung a different direction, and probably was not, you know, the amount of capability or the underestimation of the passion of those that came to the Capitol that day. And so there is maybe, you know, and I have seen that in the press, and it does make you wonder how we reacted as a nation to these particular events on the sixth and how I think in some cases we underestimated the reaction from those that participated on the sixth.*

BROWN CLAIMED HE WAS OFTEN THE ONLY AFRICAN AMERICAN IN THE ROOM

During his video on responding to the death of George Floyd, General Brown claimed that he was “the only African American in my squadron or, as a senior officer, the only African American in the room”:¹¹

“I'm thinking about my Air Force career where I was often the only African American in my squadron or, as a senior officer, the only African American in the room. I'm thinking about wearing the same flight suit with the same wings on my chest as my peers, and then being questioned by another military member, ‘Are you a pilot?’”

¹⁰ YouTube, Air Force chief of staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. on racial injustice, AI in air combat and China [January 25, 2021](#)

¹¹ Defense One "Inside the Air Force Chief's Mission for Racial Equity," [FEBRUARY 19, 2022](#)



In an interview on February 11, 2021, General Brown revisited the recurring theme of his experience as the lone Black individual among numerous white aviator colleagues¹²

...I vividly remember being in Korea. I had the same flight suit, same set of wings as my fellow white pilots, and I'd get asked, "Are you a pilot?" I can somewhat understand that, because they probably have not seen an African-American pilot. But on the same token, give me the benefit of the doubt because I'm wearing the same uniform, the same wings...

...

...As the first African-American service chief, there is a burden that individuals think that I'll be able to come in and make a sweeping change; that I can say, "Here's what we're going to do," and it's just going to happen. It doesn't quite work that way because I can't do this by myself. The one thing I can do is, by having a seat at the head of the table in some cases, I have a lot more influence...

Brown's continuous focus on race and racial issues could be seen as an indication that General Brown assigns significant importance to racial identity in the context of his role in the Air Force.

¹² People "Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Brown Jr. Opens Up About Emotional Talks on Race with His Sons" [February 11, 2021](#)

