

# Equal Writes

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## Upcoming Cultural Observances

- November -  
Native American Indian Month

## Worth Repeating

Discrimination and sexual harassment are ugly realities of our society. Their consequences can be painful and are destructive to our Corps. Since our Marine Corps is a microcosm of the society in which we live, it is not immune to these societal trends.

Despite Marine Corps Programs, commanders involvement, and training, Marines and Sailors will occasionally behave inappropriately. A strong continuing commitment is needed by everyone to minimize these behaviors and their effects.

All incidents of discrimination, whether they are racial, religious or gender related, detract from our ability to accomplish the mission effectively and is not in keeping with our core values of *HONOR, COURAGE AND COMMITMENT*. When you are confronted with such a situation, whether you are the victim, the offender, the supervisor, someone who observes the behavior, or the commander, you have an active role in eliminating discriminatory behaviors.

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Our culture surrounds us and gives us identity. Every Marine, Sailor and Civilian can make that statement about his or her immediate or adoptive culture. However, when one's culture is a subculture within a more larger or dominant culture like the Marine Corps, contrasting and conflicting identities, beliefs, values, and rewards may affect people differently.

Culture is the sharing of learned behaviors and perceptions of a group, which is passed from one generation to another through a socialization process. What is important for commanders and subordinate leaders to acknowledge is that an individual's culture is not limited to the conditioning imposed by the unit or organizational rules. As it is passed from one group to another, some elements will change while others will not. As new members of the group attempt to learn in a new or different environment, a variety of adaptations can take place. Today, no culture in the world is unchanged from what it was in the past. Even the Marine Corps culture, with its long history of customs and courtesies, is constantly being revised.

The goal of the this Equal Opportunity Program is to provide an environment where all military personnel and civilians can work and play with individuals and groups who are culturally and ethnically different from one another. This is the challenge to our leaders and the principles of good leadership.

The Marine Corps is one of the most diverse organizations in the country with an ethnic and racial makeup most reflective of American society. For many new recruits, it is probably the first opportunity to meet and communicate with people who are "different." These differences can be manifested through skin color, gender, religion, language, attitudes, or in simple mannerisms.

Over the history of our nation we have seen how the converging of these differences can create conflict. Sometimes these differences were tolerated and sometimes they were not. If not properly handled, conflict and other negative behaviors based on actual or perceived differences can be detrimental to teamwork and unit cohesion. The responsibility of Marine Corps leadership is to recognize and manage these differences so that they do not interfere with mission effectiveness and ability to fight and win on the battlefield.

## Diversity at its Best!

*"It is very easy to draw the link between democracy and diversity, implicitly arguing that democracy cannot be achieved unless diversity comes to be honored. [...] In connecting democracy and diversity, the suggestion is that the transition to democracy - indeed the essence of the democratic project itself - cannot be accomplished without the full integration of all peoples into the life of every nation. Democracy means inclusiveness, not exclusiveness."*

Speech delivered by Milica Pesic, director of Media Diversity Institute at the Conference on Covering Diversity, Tbilisi, Georgia.

## EO DICTIONARY

### **STEREOTYPE** (an idea)

A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences. Even positive stereotypes, such as Asians are good at math and computers, have a negative impact.

### **PREJUDICE** (a feeling)

Prejudice is prejudging, making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is based on stereotypes. Prejudice is a feeling or attitude.

### **DISCRIMINATION** (an action)

Discrimination is the behavior that can follow prejudicial thinking. Discrimination is the denial of justice and fair treatment in many arenas, including employment, housing and political rights

### **BIGOTRY**

Bigotry is prejudice and/or discrimination against one or all members of a particular group based on negative perceptions of their beliefs and practices or on negative group stereotypes.

### **HATE INCIDENT**

Hate-motivated incidents are defined as behavior, which constitutes an expression of hostility against the person or property of another because of the victim's race, religion, disability, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation or other group identity.

### **RACISM**

Racism is a prejudice and/or discrimination based on the myth of race. Racists believe that some groups are born superior to others and, in the name of protecting their race from "contamination," they justify the domination and destruction of races they consider to be inferior to their own.

### **SEXISM**

Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on gender.

## NAVAJO CODE TALKERS

In World War II, the Navajos answered America's call and delivered a code that was perhaps the easiest in the world to use and the hardest in the world to crack.

More than 400 Navajos joined the Marines and used this code - which involved some minor adaptations of their native tongue - to help defeat the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Thirteen Navajos made the supreme sacrifice during the war, and many more have died over the decades that have passed. Nevertheless, of the original 29 code talkers are still alive.

The Navajo code was so mystifying to those raised outside the culture that the military kept it a secret until 1968 in case it might be needed again. Consequently, the heroism and the unique contribution that these men made remained under wraps during the fanfare that accompanied the war's end.

Exhibiting great patriotism, these men were willing to do whatever it took to bring America victory. In one instance, a fifteen-year-old Navajo lied about his age to clear the minimum. Along the same lines at least one code talker was overage, so he claimed to be younger.

Their accomplishment was even more heroic given the cultural context in which they were operating. Experiencing alienation in their homeland and discouraged from speaking their own language, they still stepped forward and developed the most significant and successful military code of the time.

Before the original code talkers went to the Pacific and proved their heroism, they first had to create a code out of their language. Because of their language's pronunciations and vocabulary, it didn't take much to create a method of communication that sounded to the uninitiated like inscrutable babble.

For example, the Navajo word for "mud" became the codeword for "platoon." Likewise, the Navajo word for "crow" became the codeword for "patrol plane," and the Navajo word for "whale" became the codeword for "battleship." By war's end the code consisted of approximately 600 words.

The fact that the code was so tightly related to the Navajo language gave the Marines a special advantage given the technology of the day; it was fast communication.

Messages could be encoded and decoded instantaneously because the codes were much like ordinary conversation for code talkers using field radios. In these days of computer encryption and decryption, that may not sound impressive, but during World War II, encoding and decoding messages was a slow process.

The film, "Windtalkers" directed by John Woo and starring Nicholas Cage, pays homage to the code talkers and their service to the Marine Corps during World War II. While the movie takes the customary dramatic liberties here and there, there's nothing fictional about the heroic Native American men who answered the call above and beyond, saving the countless lives of other Americans.