



By Cassie Crosby

The Nation appears fractured with the January 6th assault on the U.S. capitol interrupting America’s most sacred democratic process. If you’re like me, and you’re watching the news 24/7, you can begin to feel like our nation really is divided, maybe even irreparably so. At a minimum, several perceived realities are playing out on a national scale, depending on the social system in which one interacts. However, I want to offer an alternative perspective and a model for unification of these realities: our nation’s military.

2020 was my last full year of service in the Army, with my impending retirement this summer. As I consider the next chapter of my life, I am also considering the state of our Nation, and I’m drawn to the reality constructed for me by the military over the past 24 years. This reality is one in which members of the military are all united in a common purpose: to fight and win our nation’s wars. The military takes people from all backgrounds and imbues them with a core set of values and a core philosophy- with no consideration given to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, or political affiliation; these factors are transparent on the battlefield.

According to sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman in their book, [*Social*](#)

Construction of Reality, “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.” Therefore, our realities are socially constructed by inputs from our social systems- families, friends, media (all types), our education, and our daily interactions with our environment, among other factors.

Humans are responsible for the societies we create. Therefore, we are all responsible for our own behavior when our differences become more apparent and the conversations more difficult. At times, it seems like Americans can no longer have difficult conversations without resorting to ad hominens, dangerous rhetoric, violence, and brutality. Is this who we want to be as a nation and as a society?

When stimuli hit our senses, our brains interpret it based on the way that information fits into our personal psychological puzzle, largely derived from our heuristics and biases. But what if we could tweak our inputs, change our perspectives, and influence our brains to develop the psychological systems and pathways that lead us closer together, rather than driving us further apart?

In order to rewire our brains, we must first recognize we have a problem and decide to change our behavior. We can the begin to expand our repertoire by diversifying our inputs and committing to considering perspectives that clash with our personal realities. Our goal should be to cultivate a society in which we treat each other as compatriots, recognizing that while we all have the right to espouse our personal perspectives, we must respect the sacred democratic processes that make this country what it is, and treat each other with dignity and respect. We must actively listen when others speak, without reloading, and then share our counter arguments with a sense of decorum absent from so many conversations today.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that the military has it all figured out- we don't. While the military is still charting its own course to improve in many areas, including

those of diversity and inclusion, its model for unity can be found in the willingness of our leaders to have difficult conversations with service members at all echelons, and our ability to unify in pursuit of a shared purpose.

While there is no shortage of disagreements amongst members of the military, and a whole host of varying viewpoints, perspectives, ideals, and political points of view, we sit at the table together and vow to respectfully work out some of our thorniest issues. Senior leaders like 22nd Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., at a volatile time in our nation’s history, [told his story](#) to help the military start a difficult conversation about race within its own ranks. He modelled vulnerability and transparency, and in doing so empowered others to find their voice and share their stories so that we can begin to heal.

When we have these conversations, we attempt to do so with empathy for those who have been most impacted by our failures in diversity, equity, and inclusion; and in consideration of our nation’s long-term goals. People have a right to be angry when they feel like they’ve been oppressed, disadvantaged, or even duped, but we have to check this emotion at the door if we want others to listen and feel like valued members of the institution, without caveats.

The military doesn’t always get it right and feedback exists in the system which causes its progress to ebb and flow over time. However, if you consider the military’s progress over the long term and changes in policy across different administrations and senior leadership, you would still see significant growth and progress in the force. You would also see a continuous effort by the institution to improve the way we treat people and create a social system in which everyone feels valued- that opportunities exist equally for all.

More importantly, the military plucks people from every corner of our country and territories and unifies them with a shared purpose, using tried and true leadership skills and attributes and values like dignity, respect, empathy, equality, duty, and selfless service as

the arbiters of unity. When those within our community commit acts that conflict with our values, we hold them accountable and we ask that they accept personal responsibility for their behavior. We focus on people’s strengths, not differences, to leverage individual skills and behaviors across diverse teams to achieve a common set of objectives; our shared purpose to fight and win our Nation’s wars.

Americans will never completely agree on the specifics of our domestic policies or foreign interests but we should be able to have a conversation and reach amicable resolutions for some of our most contentious issues. We must be willing to come to the table for rational conversations, chart a path ahead to coexist in peace as one nation, and most importantly, preserve this great democratic experiment we call America. This requires a commitment to listen to each other in the sharing of ideas, hear both sides of an issue, and most importantly, treat others the way we want to be treated.

The military has withstood the test of time. Its history and legacy survived a civil war and later, those forces came back together, unified in a common purpose. One day they were shooting and the next saluting, the military’s customs and courtesies and core set of values indelibly woven into the fabric of the force. If the military could achieve this unification after such a violent and brutal past, I believe America can too.

America also has a set of core values, in which there are currently varying degrees of faith. A State Department pamphlet designed to enable Americans to best discuss their homeland while abroad expounds on shared values like [equality, individualism, and democracy](#). To this list, I would add unity as one of the principles I’ve mentioned when engaged in similar discussions with international peers.

We are, in fact, the United States, but that name loses its meaning if our people are not also united. When George Washington spoke of the concept of unity, he envisioned it as “...wholesome plans digested by councils,” rather than individuals acting in their own

interest. Our nation, when truly whole, is still but the sum of its parts. If our people and our institutions fail to work together, or we become too myopic in our understanding of our shared reality, then our country’s very name loses its fundamental meaning.

With our American values in mind, let’s stop focusing on our differences and instead focus on our similarities as we look to calm this disruption in civility. Consider the other; there is a large part within all of us living the same reality. We work together, we shop in the same stores, and our children attend the same schools. We’re on the same grind everyday to do the best we can, and we are all bound by this common purpose- just trying to survive. It’s within that shared purpose and our shared values we can find a new reality in America, one in which we are all united in our efforts to preserve democracy and ensure the survival of our great nation.

LTC Cassandra Crosby is an Army officer and Editor-in-Chief of From the Green Notebook. Check her out at [LinkedIn](#).

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)