



Attitudes Aren't Free

A collection of Academy graduates come together to co-author a new book about diversity ...

A conversation with **Dave Levy**, '88, and **Jim Parco**, '91, co-authors of *Attitudes Aren't Free*

Sex, money, race and religion. No, these aren't just topics we're taught to avoid in professional conversations, they are also the guiding themes embraced in a new book published by Air University Press. In just six months, 8,000 copies of the book have been printed to meet an extraordinary demand. The book, *Attitudes Aren't Free: Thinking Deeply about Diversity in the US Armed Forces*, has quickly become one of the most popular and successful titles in the 57-year history of the Air Force publisher.

Especially noteworthy of this project is that 22 USAFA grads were involved with its creation; furthermore, they are as diverse as the subjects they showcase. Coming from the Class of 1963 to the Class of 2006, these contributors are white, Hispanic, black, male, female, active-duty, reservists, career officers, civilians, rated, non-rated, religious, nonreligious, lieutenants, majors and generals. *Attitudes Aren't Free* is a book about diversity, built on diversity and the critical diversity of perspectives.

Attitudes Aren't Free emerged as the vision of two USAFA grads: Jim Parco, '91, and Dave Levy, '88. After publishing their first book in 2009, *The 52nd Floor: Thinking Deeply About Leadership*, they discovered that their new approach to diversity resonated with people. *Checkpoints* sat down with the co-authors to reflect

on how the project began, and what it contributes to the on-going debate on diversity in the military.

Parco recalls, "Dave and I recognized the importance that diversity played in the work place, and we decided to write a book that would begin to foster a more critical dialogue. Diversity is such a complex topic, and what we really needed to do was span a spectrum of topics. We began to ask ourselves, 'who out there has the best arguments?' The answer is activists. So we reached out to some of the brightest voices in the United States. We went to the far right and the far left."

The two authors sought input from both sides of the socio-political spectrum, asking each polarizing party to write chapters for the book. All of the varying authors make their arguments, provide data to support their claims and, most important, provide recommendations for new legislation to address needed changes.

Speaking on the topics that these varying authors submitted, Parco exclaims, "Our results varied in everything from religious expression, homosexuality, race, gender, ethics, and other critical military issues."

The authors surmise that for the longest time, whenever one talked about diversity in a class or seminar, one could watch peoples' eyes collectively roll back in boredom. This was a tragedy because all the literature shows that complexity will continue to increase in a system as long as one condition is met: excess energy on which to grow. As



complexity increases, diversity also increases. Looking at nature, ecosystems that embrace diversity flourish. Those that don't, stagnate and die. Organizational diversity is no different. Diversity isn't a leadership program, it has become a national security imperative. Yet, few people see it as such; so the authors decided to write a book about it. Their first challenge was evident almost immediately: *what could two white, male USAFA grads offer on diversity?*

Last fall, Parco and Levy reached out to some of the brightest voices on the topics of religious expression, sexual orientation, race, gender ethics and other social policy topics of current interest. Included as authors are several nationally-known activists, both right-wing and left-wing, alongside a variety of other experts from across the services. Initially, they had a lot of interest from academics, but eventually decided that they wanted the book to have a more practical focus. In their dialogue with the contributing authors, Levy and Parco asked people specifically *not* to write a fair and balanced piece. "Instead," Parco explains, "we wanted them to tell us what they believed, provide the evidence and arguments supporting their position, then, make specific policy recommendations on what they believe senior leaders and policy makers should do to improve the lives of men and women serving in the armed forces."

The result was a 29-chapter volume authored by a variety of experts, each coming from a different perspective. Each chapter had its biases, which is precisely what the authors wanted. Across each section, just about every conceivable argument appears on both sides of the more contentious issues. In the end, there are two perspectives captured in the book, explains Parco. "The right and the wrong, and it's up to each reader to decide for him or herself."

Once the authors had the chapters, they set up a peer-review process to ensure that the quality of each submission was sufficiently high to warrant publication. They reached out to a variety of experts to referee chapters in a blind-review process. Not all of the chapters made it, but those that did made it not because someone agreed with the argument, but because the arguments stood on their own and were worthy of discussion.

Lieutenant General Bill Lord, '77, authored the *Foreword* to the book. In it, he articulated the importance of fostering a robust conversation centered around ideas that can continually improve the strength and effectiveness of today's military. General Lord writes, "We hope this monograph can open our collective apertures to look at some very thorny issues in an open-minded manner. We've tried to present many sides of each issue by using some authoritative sources. For many decades the AF has been a change agent—*Attitudes Aren't Free* provides additional thought provoking leadership, as is our heritage."

The book is arranged into four primary sections by theme (Religious Expression, Homosexuality, Race and Gender, and Social Policy Perspectives 2010). Within each section, there are several chapters which embrace a different perspective surrounding the section's theme. Parco and Levy point out that because of the unbalanced nature of many of the individual chapters, it is critically important that readers focus on the entire spectrum of perspectives presented within a section to ensure they have the context necessary to frame any single perspective.

Parco also explains, "The book is also very useful in a variety of different situations. Context matters. If you have a room of full

bird colonels talking about religious diversity, their conversation is going to be dramatically different from the dialogue which happens between a Major and his enlisted."

One of the best ways to illustrate this method of pitting opposing viewpoints is examined in the current debate on the military's 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' policy. "When you look at this specific case," Parco says, "the two voices which come to mind are Elaine Donnelly, President for the Center of Military Readiness, and Dr. Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center at the University of California."

Parco explains that Donley routinely testifies before congress in support of the current law which originated in the Clinton administration. In the chapter she

wrote for the book, Elaine makes all the arguments for 'Don't Ask Don't Tell.' Dr. Belkin, on the other hand, writes in support of allowing homosexuals to serve openly in the military. "These are complex issues," Parco says, "and we need to be opening a dialogue that puts these issues on the table. As organizations become more complex, it takes complex solutions to resolve conflict."

Levy chimes in, "The discussions you see on television or hear about on the radio are little more than sound bites. In order to understand these issues, you have to examine both sides of the coin in order to make an informed decision." Levy touches

on another sensitive topic. "Religious expression is another example of a very emotional issue for most people. The key to resolution is getting beyond the emotions and listening to the arguments on both sides."

Parco says that the book is designed to show people both sides of the argument, to spark a dialogue, and to show people the merits from each perspective. "Our hope," he says, "is to help people become better analytical thinkers. This book was initially designed for students, but when you think about the emphasis the military places on education, the practical applications for the book span all the way from Airmanship Academy, to Senior Service School, to Air War College. Any place where you have people together in an academic environment, this book is profoundly useful."

Although *attitudes* aren't free, the books actually are. Electronic copies are available through the Google Book Project or by visiting the AU Press website. Any current employee of Air Force—military or civilian—can request a free hardcover copy of the book directly from the publisher.

For more information, visit www.dodpolicy.org. 

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