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**How do the Tuskegee  
Airmen still Influence our  
Air Force Today?**

There are no black leaders. The black man has a lower mental status compared to the white man. Blacks have weak character. All training for black soldiers must be in plain, simple terms due to their lack of intelligence. These were statements made in a study by the Army War College in 1925. The Tuskegee Airmen, becoming the first African American military pilots in the United States, were key influencers to proving these absurd statements wrong. Through all the challenges and discrimination they faced, the accomplishments they made were nothing the nation expected. The Tuskegee Airmen flew 15,533 sorties from May of 1943 to June of 1945. They destroyed 251 enemy aircraft and damaged many others. They flew over 100 overseas missions and over 700 bomber escorting missions. The Tuskegee Airmen's actions continue to influence the United States Air Force today by guiding the way for future African American pilots, showing the need for equal opportunities, generating diversity, and leading the way for great leaders of the United States of America.

The Tuskegee Airmen marked history by becoming the first African American military aviators, leading the way for future pilots today. Throughout the military, there was continuous segregation and discrimination based on race towards African Americans. In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Air Corps to form an all-black flying unit. This unit became the Tuskegee Airmen. The Tuskegee Airmen broke through barriers and proved to the nation that they were capable of accomplishing greatness. Between 1940 and 1946, 996 African American pilots were trained at Tuskegee Army Air Field. There were a total of 165,000 black and white pilots from the United States during WWII. Based on this data, it can be calculated that just about 0.604% of the pilots were African American. Recent data shows that currently in the United States Air Force 2.1% of the pilots are black. Though this may not seem like a large number, the Tuskegee Airmen are the brave soldiers who paved the way for future black aviators.

The airmen faced hardship and backlash, but persevered allowing the future of black pilots in the United States military to increase and be given equal chances to be successful.

Equal opportunities were not always present in the United States military. The United States Air Force states, “In the military EO [Equal Opportunity] context, the policies provide for equal opportunity and treatment for all members based on their race, color, sex, national origin, religion, or sexual orientation.” During the time when the Tuskegee Airmen were paving the way to the future, equal opportunity as it is now in the military was not in place. The Tuskegee Airmen were segregated based on race and were not given the same opportunities in the military. Instead of giving up and listening to all the people doubting them, the Tuskegee Airmen pushed away the negativity and proved their importance to the military. Though equal opportunity was not in place until 1948 when an executive order was announced, it did not do anything to integrate white and black soldiers together. The Tuskegee Airmen proved that no matter their race, they were going to make an impact on the world and make themselves known so others who were also discriminated against could do the same.

The Tuskegee Airmen brought much needed diversity into career fields in the United States military. There are many benefits to diversity, such as: a variety of talents, different perspectives, more ideas, and more skills and knowledge. By having more diversity and people from different backgrounds, it brings different talents and skill sets. By having a more diverse military, there would be a larger variety of strengths. Also, each individual may have a different perspective on a situation. A larger diversity of people can help solve problems and generate more ideas than if people from the same background with similar life experiences were working together. The Tuskegee Airmen brought diversity through race into the Air Force by becoming

the first African American pilots, which became the stepping stones to the future of diversity in the Air Force.

From the start when the Tuskegee Airmen became the first African American military pilots, their influence in African American pilots following in their footsteps is still seen today. One notable pilot in the Air Force is Maj. Paul Lopez II. In 2018, he was chosen to be the first African American pilot on the F-22 Demonstration Team. Without the Tuskegee Airmen having the courage to become the aviators when they did, Maj. Lopez may not have had this opportunity due to discrimination. Another influential African American leader in the Air Force is Lt Col Shawna Kimbrell. In 2000, she became the first ever female, African American pilot in the history of the United States Air Force. The Tuskegee Airmen brought African Americans into the world of military aviation, paving a path for Shawna Kimbrell, who now sends a message to the rest of the nation showing that anyone can achieve what they put their mind to. There are many inspirational African American pilots who have become very successful and have made momentous accomplishments.

The future of African Americans in the United States Air Force was influenced by the Tuskegee Airmen who implemented diversity, took advantage of opportunities, and became leaders when all odds were against them. Though equal opportunity was not implemented until after the Tuskegee Airmen, this did not stop them from being the pioneers of African American pilots in the military. Their influence inspired more African Americans to join the Air Force, and the numbers of African American pilots increase to this day. The diversity they brought was beneficial to the Army Air Corps, even though the Army War College in 1925 believed they would hold the military back. The Tuskegee Airmen proved those studies wrong, and to this day new African American leaders and pilots continue to be successful and change the Air Force to

become better. The Tuskegee Airmen's unforgettable contributions forever changed the path of the United States Air Force and the entire country.

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