



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on December 9, 2020

Twitter Mob Wrong: Yeager Did Not Block a Black Pilot From Becoming the First Black Astronaut

American hero [Chuck Yeager](#) entered the Army Air Corps as a private. He retired from the Air Force as a brigadier general. He was an ace in a day in World War II, and broke the sound barrier.

He was, Tom Wolfe wrote in *The Right Stuff*, “the most righteous of all the possessors of the right stuff,” one of the daring pilots who flew the United States into the space age.

But all that must be ignored, says the usual leftist Twitter mob. Yeager, [who died](#) December 7, was a “racist.” A bigot. A hater. A black-hearted man. Because, they claim, he kept [Ed Dwight](#), a black jet pilot, from becoming America’s first black astronaut.



AP Images

Yet the very *New York Times* story used to claim that Yeager wrecked Dwight’s career shows that Yeager did no such thing. So does a story in *Smithsonian* magazine.

And Yeager’s autobiography provides a full account of the matter, the sum of which is this: Dwight was unqualified for the test program and graduated only with help, after which NASA turned him down.

But Yeager got the blame.

Yeager Haters Unhinged

Almost the minute Yeager [slipped the surly bonds](#) of Earth for good, a ranting, mouth-breathing [Twitter mob began](#) the Two Minutes Hate.

“Let’s not forget Chuck Yeager denied black pilot Ed Dwight his rightfully deserved spot as the first ever black astronaut,” one ill-informed Twitter mobster answered actress Mia Farrow’s condolence tweet. “Yeah. Chuck was a racist POS too.”

Another of Yeager’s crimes? He liked Republicans:

Chuck Yeager died retweeting Ted Cruz and thanking Gym Jordan in the last month...so, at least another racist white guy is no longer here. I don’t care what kind of aviator he was. He was a racist dips**t.”

Citing *Smithsonian*, a masked member of the Branch Covidians offered this: “Chuck Yeager was a racist who used his position to maintain the status quo of racism. This is his legacy.”



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A defund-the-police advocate tweeted this factoid:

Ed Dwight was chosen by the Kennedy administration to be the first black astronaut. Extreme racist Chuck Yeager did everything in his power to sabotage Dwight. Let's not celebrate that racist for flying a plane that much better men designed.

And so on and so forth.

A Black Lives Matter fan even went after Yeager's wife.

"Before you get all tore up about Chuck Yeager, check out some of his wife's racist and idiotic tweets," the BLM kook tweeted.

Two Stories

Yet the main story the hate-Yeager crowd cites, [a profile](#) about Dwight that appeared in *Times*, proves Yeager did not do what the Twitter lynch mob says.

Granted, it includes Dwight's claim that Yeager tried to shoot down his career when he landed at the Aerospace Research Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base.

Yeager, then the commandant, tried to force him out, Dwight told the *Times*:

From Day 1, Dwight said, Yeager wanted him gone. Yeager had little patience for White House input on military matters, as he explained in his 1985 autobiography, "Yeager." Dwight said he immediately felt he was not welcome, that he was not of the group. "He told those guys on the first day, 'We can get him out of here in six months. We can break him,'" Dwight remembered a classmate telling him....

"Every week, right on the dot," Dwight recalled, "he'd call me into his office and say, 'Are you ready to quit? This is too much for you and you're going to kill yourself, boy.' Calling me a boy and I'm an officer in the Air Force."

That isn't how Yeager remembered it, the [Times reported](#):

He said he did not tell anybody that he would get Dwight out of the program, did not have weekly meetings with him and did not call him "boy." But he was no champion of Dwight and did question his ability. "Isn't it great that Ed Dwight found his true calling and became an accomplished sculptor?" Yeager said in an email.

Yeager thought Dwight was unqualified, the *Times* reported, and was "incensed," when Dwight went over his head to complain about bias.

But his anger went beyond that, as Yeager wrote in his autobiography. "The Air Force counselor, their chief lawyer, flew to Edwards from the Pentagon to personally take charge of the case," he wrote.

Man, I was hot. I told that lawyer: "You do have a case of discrimination here. The White House discriminated by forcing us to take an unqualified guy. And we would have



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discriminated by passing him because he was black.”

Dwight was a relentless self-promoter by his own admission, lobbying his case at the Pentagon, something else Yeager didn't like, the *Times* reported.

But the piece in *Smithsonian* [sheds light](#) on why Dwight wasn't chosen as an astronaut:

Yeager, the head of the flight test school, maintained that Dwight was only admitted due to preferential treatment and that he only passed the first portion of the course — in the first year of the school's existence — with special assistance from instructors.

Though Dwight performed poorly in the first phase of the course, *Smithsonian* reported of Yeager's evaluation, he was sent to the second phase with help from high up. General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, called Yeager and told him the Kennedy White House wanted a black astronaut.

“The number of accepted students was expanded from 11 to 15, and Dwight was included along with three more white pilots,” the magazine reported.

And, Yeager continued in his biography, “I was caught in a buzz saw of controversy involving a black student. The White House, Congress, and civil rights groups came at me with meat cleavers, and the only way I could save my head was to prove I wasn't a damned bigot.”

But even more damaging to the claim that Yeager was a racist who ruined Dwight's dreams of space travel was this, again [from the Times](#):

Yeager ultimately graduated him. *Despite initial concerns about Dwight's flying ability*, and the question of whether astronauts even needed to be pilots, the 30-year-old was now eligible for space. As the commandant [Yeager] wrote, “Dwight hung on and squeezed through. He got his diploma qualifying him to be the nation's first black astronaut.”

Now it was up to NASA.

[Emphasis added.]

Still, despite the Kennedy administration's abiding interest in a black astronaut, and a recommendation from the Air Force, NASA did not choose Dwight for the [next group](#).

In other words, JFK's NASA, not Yeager, kept Dwight out of space.

Yeager's Autobiography

That surface treatment from *Times* and *Smithsonian* alone exonerates Yeager. But an excerpt from Yeager's autobiography [at widow Victoria Yeager's website](#) explains what the two liberal publications didn't. Dwight was unqualified for test-pilot school and only graduated with extra help after the Kennedy boys forced Yeager to accept him.

The school had 11 seats and four alternates, chosen from 26 applicants. No. 26 was Ed Dwight, and after the school published its list of test pilots, Yeager received a phone call from LeMay's people: “The White House wanted a black pilot in the space course.”

Yeager explained that the class was full. But when LeMay passed that along, “a 150-millimeter shell came ripping in from the White House and LeMay was told: ‘By God, you will have a black pilot in that



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program — now!”

And so Dwight entered the program. He was “an average pilot with an average academic background,” Yeager wrote, not “a bad pilot, but he wasn’t exceptionally talented either.”

But against the top-flight pilots ready preparing for space-flight, he “just couldn’t compete,” Yeager wrote:

In those days, there were still comparatively few black pilots in the Air Force, but Dwight sure as hell didn’t represent the top of the talent pool. I had flown with outstanding pilots like Emmett Hatch and Eddie Lavelle, but unfortunately (black) guys of their quality didn’t apply for the course. Dwight did. So determined was the Kennedy Administration to have a black pilot in the program, they also lowered the standards for height. Dwight was shorter than the required 5’4”. So, we brought him in, set up a special tutoring program to get him through the academics because, as I recall, he lacked the engineering academics that all the other students had.

Dwight had major academic problems in the school, and even with the tutors “he just couldn’t hack it,” Yeager wrote.

And he didn’t keep up in flying. I worked with him on that and so did other instructors, but our students were flying at levels of proficiency that were really beyond his experience. The only prejudice against Dwight was a conviction shared by all the instructors that he was not qualified to be in the school.

So severe were Dwight’s problems that LeMay gave up: “Chuck, if you want to wash out Dwight, I’ll back you all the way.”

Yet “Dwight hung on and squeezed through,” as the *Times* reprised Yeager’s own words. “He got his diploma qualifying him to be the nation’s first black astronaut.”

Here is what the *Times* left out:

But NASA did not select him and a few powerful supporters in Washington demanded to know why. The finger of blame was pointed at the school and I was hauled on the carpet to answer charges of racism raised by Dwight and some of his friends.

All hell broke loose. A few black congressmen announced they would launch an investigation of the incident and the Air Force counselor, their chief lawyer, flew to Edwards from the Pentagon to personally take charge of the case. Man, I was hot. I told that lawyer, “You do have a case of discrimination here. The White House discriminated by forcing us to take an unqualified guy. And we would have discriminated by passing him because he was black.” Maybe “discrimination” was the wrong word, but I made my point. Anyway, the decision was made to fly in a group of black civil rights attorneys and a few congressmen and show them Dwight’s school records.

Dwight “lacks the academic background and the flying skill to do it,” Yeager told the group. “Anyone with his grades deserved to be washed out, or it would be discrimination in reverse. Now, here are his



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complete school records from day one. Let's review them page by page."

Once the group saw Dwight's performance, "they were satisfied that prejudice was in no way involved in this case."

So even if Yeager did push Dwight to drop out, as Dwight claims, Yeager graduated an unqualified applicant who only "hung on" with special tutoring; i.e., Yeager, again, *did not* ground Dwight's career as the first black astronaut.



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