



# • GRATEFUL NATION •

STUDENT VETERANS AND THE RISE

OF THE MILITARY-FRIENDLY CAMPUS

ELLEN MOORE

• **GRATEFUL NATION** •

GLOBAL INSECURITIES

A series edited by Catherine Besteman and Daniel M. Goldstein

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STUDENT VETERANS AND THE RISE  
OF THE MILITARY-FRIENDLY CAMPUS

Ellen Moore

Duke University Press   Durham and London   2017

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞  
Text designed by Courtney Leigh Baker  
Typeset in Whitman by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Names: Moore, Ellen, [date] author.  
Title: Grateful nation : student veterans and the rise of the  
“military-friendly” campus / Ellen Moore.  
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2017. |  
Series: Global insecurities | Includes bibliographical  
references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2017018614 (print) |  
LCCN 2017022676 (ebook) |  
ISBN 9780822372769 (ebook)  
ISBN 9780822368809 (hardcover : alk. paper)  
ISBN 9780822369097 (pbk. : alk. paper)  
Subjects: LCSH: Veterans—Education (Higher)—United  
States. | Veterans—Education (Higher)—California.  
Classification: LCC UB357 (ebook) | LCC UB357 .M65 2017  
(print) | DDC 378.1/9826970973—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017018614>

COVER ART: U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret.  
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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
VETERANS RETURNING FROM WARS AND  
TO ALL THOSE COMMITTED TO  
ENDING WAR

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## Preface

My interest in veteran support and higher education is rooted in my family history. I was born on a U.S. military base to an Army captain father and a pacifist mother, and have lived in communities where I was exposed to the diverse worldviews of both military members and civilians. My father grew up during the Depression in a working-class family in Fresno, California, then a small agricultural town. For my father, military service and G.I. Bill education benefits provided a pathway to academic opportunities that eventually enabled him to join the professional class and later provided me with a straightforward pathway into college. Within my family narratives of social mobility are inextricably tied to narratives of military service. Thus, my research on military veterans in college involves multiple layers of my identity as a student, a daughter, a university instructor, a civically engaged citizen, a writer, and an analyst.

As this book goes to press in the spring of 2017, the rhetoric of war has returned to America with renewed force. Daily life in the United States is marked by a heightened sense of vulnerability and anxiety about national security. We are warned that enemies at home and abroad threaten U.S. jobs, families, homes, and a presumed singular U.S. cultural identity. This national insecurity problem has come with an built-in solution: militarized interventions in the form of expanded and instrumental use of deadly force by police, walled-off militarized border zones, and local sheriffs deputized as deportation “force multipliers” in multiple, simultaneous wars against perceived enemies.

At this fearful and precarious time in history, this book argues that it is crucial to engage in difficult conversations about war and peace, consent and dissent, social conformity and social difference, and about what it takes for a nation to be demonstrably secure. Yet finding common ground across diverse worldviews can be difficult, especially when the country is involved in highly

contested military and political conflicts. We are living in a highly polarized ideological environment that suppresses nuance, heterogeneity of thought, and comfort with ambivalence. This polarization is apparent in national discussions about the economy, national security, health care, immigration policies, education, and policing. A similar polarization is apparent in discussions about military veterans, military service, and the current wars.

News and social media stories about military veterans routinely characterize participants, institutions, or actions dichotomously as pro- or antiwar, pro- or antiveteran, and pro- or antimilitary. But what do these dichotomous terms really mean? This question surfaced time and time again as I became immersed in veteran support services. The three years I spent in and around veteran communities showed that these dichotomies cannot adequately describe diverse beliefs held by military members, veterans, and civilians about relationships with the military and the contemporary wars. These labels take a broad brush to ideological dispositions, inhibiting critical exchange.

I began this research by asking veterans about their experiences in the military and in college. With time, my findings led to new questions as I observed tensions in the making and unmaking of soldier and student identities. I was troubled by the deployment of an antiveteran label against those who voiced dissent from military policies or actions. This labeling precluded critiques of wars that caused soldiers to die on the battlefield and to take their own lives at war or at home. My experience showed that this formulation was no accident but instead emerged from a militarized common sense that conflates support for veterans with support for the institutional military and silent acquiescence to the wars, which in turn serves to rationalize and enable a permanent state of war.

My hope is that this book will provide analysis to help people differentiate between support for veterans and support for the wars in which they fought. It challenges dualistic understandings of pro- or anti-military, veteran, and war to broaden our discussion about what it means to be a soldier, veteran, or civilian in a country at war. The book looks closely at military recruits' experiences, at the transitions from civilian to combatant and back again into civilian society. By analyzing the influence of popular narratives about veterans and veterans' needs on college campuses, I find, among other things, that the simple gesture of thanking soldiers for their service can be transformed into tacit support for war. In offering this gesture, I ask that we carefully consider not only what we honor with our gratitude but also what we suppress.

## **Acknowledgments**

The act of writing a can be a solitary effort, but many people contributed to this book and I am grateful for their inspiration, critique, advice, and technical assistance during the many stages of research and writing. First and foremost, I want to thank the veterans who spent many hours in conversation with me, and without whom this book would not exist. For reasons of confidentiality, I can't name them, but I am grateful for their generosity of spirit in trusting me with their stories and sharing their experiences, their accomplishments, and their conflicts. From these veterans I learned that service and sacrifice can and do take many forms. Many chose to speak with me because they wanted their experience to be shared for the benefit of other veterans; that is my hope as well. I have done my best to be faithful to their stories, even as my conclusions and analysis may not be universally shared by participants.

My sincere gratitude also goes to the college instructors and staff who allowed me to observe their work on behalf of student veterans. Those who perform the difficult work of designing and providing support services typically do not receive the credit they deserve, and these instructors and staff worked long hours providing behind-the-scenes support to the veterans profiled in this book. While my analysis offers a critical perspective of social forces that produce militarism on campuses, this book is in no way intended to diminish the importance of the work of these service providers. Among them I found extraordinary teachers and advisors, and their commitment to veterans' educational success was a continuing source of inspiration.

This book comes out of my dissertation research, for which I was fortunate to receive advice and mentorship from exceptional critical scholars. Their intellectual influence on this work is indelible. I am deeply indebted to Jean Lave for her ongoing and steadfast guidance, for her willingness to help me clarify

arguments and confront intellectual dilemmas, and for offering me a postdoctoral scholarly home and workspace at the Slow Science Institute. Many thanks to Gillian Hart for helping me to understand processes of articulation and for highlighting the enduring relevance of Gramsci's work. I am deeply indebted to Wendy Brown for encouraging me to push past easy formulations and to strive for analysis that reflected the complicated—and complicating—humanity of all those involved in this study.

Thanks to all of my colleagues at the Slow Science Institute for their intellectual support and comradeship during the preparation of this book. I'm indebted to the Slow Science Institute for providing the space to develop this book in the company of visiting scholars and fellows from across the San Francisco Bay Area, the United States, and from around the world. Affiliates are too numerous to name here, but particular thanks go to Jean Lave, Cheryl Holtzmeyer, Mike Dwyer, Ashwin Jacob Mathew, Rodrigo Ribeiro, and Janaki Srinivasan for their interdisciplinary curiosity, their critical engagement with and feedback on this research, and for practicing slow science in a fast-science world.

I am deeply grateful to my teachers and colleagues at the UC Berkeley Center for Research on Social Change (CRSC) and the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, from which I received not only financial assistance but incalculable support and intellectual mentorship. Profound and enduring thanks go to mentors Christine Trost, Deborah Freedman Lustig, and David Minkus for their extensive feedback on early chapter drafts. Special thanks also go to CRSC fellows Margo Mahan, Ricardo Huerta Niño, Erica Mitsako Boas, and Hector Fernando Burga, who read and critiqued early versions of chapters. My arguments were strengthened through their critical feedback, and my spirits were buoyed by their supportive camaraderie.

Thanks to members of the Social and Cultural Studies writing group: Becky Tarlau, Chela Delgado, Nirali Jani, Cecilia Lucas, and Kimberly Vinall for reading and commenting on many iterations of this work.

The research and writing of this book were made possible with assistance from the Toto Fellowship at the University of California Berkeley Graduate School of Education. A dissertation fellowship from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation gave me the opportunity to spend one year solely devoted to writing and analyzing my research data.

It is a pleasure and an honor that this book found a home in the Duke University Press Global Insecurities Series, and I am grateful to editors Catherine Besteman and Daniel Goldstein for opening that door. Thanks to the Duke University Press editorial staff, particularly to Gisela Fosado and Lydia

Rose Rappoport-Hankins, for their guidance and assistance through the production process. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback and suggestions. Special thanks goes to David Vine for his careful reading and rereading of this manuscript. His critical insights made this a better book. I am also grateful to Jessica Cobb for her analytic acuity and stellar editorial advice. I am indebted to Catherine Lutz, both for her critical military scholarship that has informed and animated this project and for her early words of encouragement about this book.

Many friends and family have supported this project in a variety of ways. Thanks to Kirsten Irgens-Moller, Christopher Ho, Monica Moore, Sally Fairfax, Philip Moore, David Szanton, Martha Moore, Lincoln Cushing, Adrienne Aron, Bart Shulman, Becky Tarlau, Adam Kruggel, Norman Solomon, Cheryl Higgins, Jodi Levin, Aaron Hughes, Dan Cowles, and Helene Schulman Lorenz for their support, which included giving editorial feedback, technical assistance, graphic design advice, accompaniment on research trips, transcription and research assistance, and general encouragement over the course of writing this book.

Thanks to Leah Halper and Helene Schulman Lorenz for opening their homes to me on research trips for this book, and for sharing meals, ideas, contacts, and critiques.

Finally, to Charlie, Josie, and Maya: thank you for your patience with my absences and my research-related preoccupations. Thank you for reminding me every day and in countless ways that knowledge production is important, but that family is forever.

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## Introduction

On the sunny suburban campus of Los Olmos Community College, a palpable buzz of anticipation—made up of equal parts excitement and tension—circulated around Parking Lot B. The college had been preparing for Veterans Day for weeks. Members of the campus veterans club put finishing touches on the tables in the courtyard, setting up signs and ferrying food for invited guests, as support service providers arranged brochures and pens, keychains and water bottles advertising social services for veterans. In the parking lot, a fifty-foot Tiller hook-and-ladder fire engine was parked with its ladder extending high above campus. Attached to its rungs flew flags of the five branches of military services. Students from the school's police and firefighter public safety programs stood in parade rest position (feet shoulder-width apart, hands touching behind backs) and practiced crowd-control techniques as they formed a human perimeter around the parking lot, which on this day also served as a helicopter landing pad. The daylong event began with an aerial military salute—a flyover and landing on campus grounds of a Vietnam War-era Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division Huey helicopter. Hundreds of observers on the ground watched as the helicopter descended slowly, ceremoniously circling above campus before touching down. Upon landing, a team of officers in Army combat fatigues jumped from the aircraft to pose for pictures, as the crowd of observers applauded and whooped in appreciation.

The opening ceremony was followed by formal presentations from a local Air Force base color guard.<sup>1</sup> After the formal flag salute, two Los Olmos students sang the U.S. national anthem and “God Bless America,” while the crowd of students, faculty, administrators, and community supporters stood solemnly facing the flags, hands placed over hearts or saluting hand-to-forehead. The atmosphere at Los Olmos that day was at once festive and solemn, both reverential



and celebratory. It was clear that this occasion was meant to commemorate both veterans and the wars in which they fought, as well as the institutional military to which they had belonged.

A few days later in another part of the state, a group of student veterans sat in a classroom on the campus of Southwest University (SU) listening to a talk given by a local Veterans Affairs (VA) representative. This was a veterans' orientation class, where student veterans were welcomed and introduced to the campus. Meeting weekly, student veterans received instruction in academic norms, expectations, and customs of the university. On that day in November, there was an unmistakable feeling of affection in the room, extended to every one of the thirty (twenty-eight men, two women) student veterans. It appeared that all student veterans were welcomed and cared for in this space. Whatever tips students had picked up in the first weeks of school, they shared with the group: the importance of keeping aware of deadlines, how to avoid late fees, and how to get into classes if they missed the enrollment deadline. They shared information about special adaptive equipment available for veterans with disabilities, and advised one another on the intricacies of GI Bill benefits, with tips on how to plan the semester to ensure that they wouldn't run out of money before graduating. The student veterans offered advice about which classes to take and suggested taking harder classes during summer session, when there would be less pressure; they exchanged information about which professors were particularly friendly toward veterans, and which professors were supportive of military policies.

On this day the class listened attentively to the VA representative talk about what it was like to come to the large urban university campus in the late 1960s to recruit students to enlist in the military. The speaker, who was also a veteran of the Vietnam War, opened his presentation by saying that the university "has its own legacy, not always friendly to the military," and recounted a story about his friend, a former marine and Vietnam War veteran, who was sent to recruit students on the SU campus: "[My friend] said that as a Marine recruiter, he was more afraid coming to this campus than he was at Khe Sanh." While the reference to one of the deadliest land battles of the Vietnam War was assumed to be hyperbolic and students chuckled appreciatively at the characterization, it nonetheless positioned SU as a frighteningly hostile place—enemy territory in which marines could expect to be physically attacked or even killed. This speaker invoked a past imaginary—rather than present reality—of the contemporary university as hostile to the U.S. military. In doing so, he positioned his recruiter friend, himself, and his audience of current student veterans as

beleaguered victims of a collegiate environment unsympathetic to the mission of the U.S. military and to veterans.

These two examples illustrate seemingly opposite phenomena faced by contemporary veterans on college campuses. Symbols of military valorization and patriotism are the new normal on many campuses, as college administrators, faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to express gratitude for service and sacrifice by veterans, yet there is a concurrent and abiding mythology that contemporary college campuses are unwelcoming to war veterans and hostile to their viewpoints. This book is about the tensions arising from these simultaneous and contradictory discourses, and about how these distinct narratives—of increasing military valorization and ostensible hostility toward veterans—are taking place on college campuses amid an absence of discussion about the actual wars in which the U.S. military is engaged. It is also about how this absence of discussion serves to obviate dissent and distance the U.S. civilian population from the human consequences of war. In combination, these social processes help to erase and thus naturalize a state of permanent war.

College campuses are often spaces of critique and dissent, yet over a decade into the widely unpopular contemporary wars (collectively known as the Global War on Terrorism, or GWOT), college campuses are largely silent about the wars. At the same time, these wars have militarized daily life in the United States. Some signs of the militarization of social space are new, like police-deployed surveillance drones and decommissioned armored personnel carriers patrolling city streets.<sup>2</sup> Other signs of militarization have become commonplace to the point of being unremarkable: civilians driving Hummer-branded vehicles, children carrying camouflage-patterned backpacks to school, and the Homeland Security apparatus marking everyday life in U.S. airports, government buildings, hospitals, electronic communications, mass media, and entertainment.

Our social world is also militarized, although in less noticeable ways. Everyday consciousness is informed by a militarized common sense, which I define as the embedded worldview that war is a natural and necessary aspect of maintaining and protecting nationhood; military priorities are more important than nonmilitary ones; and war veterans should serve as positive public symbols of U.S. military actions. Militarized common sense naturalizes the valorization of the military on college campuses. Militarized common sense is a salient social force that portrays the interests of the individual soldier as inseparable from the interests of the institutional military and military projects.

The U.S. military has been in and around the academy for a long time. Indeed, two of the oldest colleges in the nation, West Point (est. 1802) and Annapolis

Naval Academy (est. 1845), were founded by and are administered by the armed services. But today the ties between the military and higher education are both more ubiquitous and less obvious: U.S. departments of Defense and Homeland Security pour billions of research dollars into the development of weapons and cybersecurity systems, robotics and biometric identification systems used by official and unofficial military organizations around the globe.<sup>3</sup>

The militarization of the academy has been the subject of extensive scholarship as have military efforts to organize support from civilian academics.<sup>4</sup> Much of the existing scholarship documents ways that the military has guided, gathered, shaped, and suppressed knowledge to further military goals through research grants and academic partnerships; and chronicles ways in which academics are recruited for military purposes through research funding, endowed chairs, and preferential access to information.<sup>5</sup>

The direct financial relationship between the U.S. military and American universities dates back at least to World War II, when universities were presented with a willing and wealthy patron in the U.S. armed forces. As a result, many universities expanded the scope of their research and academic departments, especially in disciplines of physics, chemistry, biology, and technology.<sup>6</sup> Military funding of academic institutions continued after World War II and has increased dramatically since that time, most notably after September 11, 2001. For example, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) awarded 12,753 prime contracts to colleges and universities in 2000, worth a total of \$4,449,065,114; by 2006, the DoD had awarded 62,488 such contracts worth \$46,748,542,346.<sup>7</sup>

The post-9/11 increases in DoD funding of academic research have been accompanied by a comparable rise in military tuition payments to American colleges and universities. From 2002 to 2011, over 4 million education benefits claims were filed by U.S. military veterans, representing more than 30 billion dollars.<sup>8</sup> In an era in which higher education is defined and shaped by permanent budget crises, student veterans bring billions of dollars in guaranteed tuition to college campuses, creating strong financial incentives for colleges to project themselves as friendly toward the U.S. military in pursuit of GI Bill-funded veterans.

This book examines the effects of military training and the contemporary wars on student veterans, and it traces effects of military-valorizing discourse on the institutions of higher education in which veterans enroll. Just as civilians must learn to become soldiers and adapt to military life, veterans must learn to become college students by adapting to civilian academic norms and practices. In turn, the presence of student veterans on college campuses trans-

forms institutional practices and discourse. Institutional initiatives designed to welcome veterans to college ultimately welcome military viewpoints and suppress debate about the current wars. Thus, the militarization of common sense on college campuses narrows and suppresses democratic debate.

Some scholars and veterans' affairs specialists assume that civilian campus cultures are hostile toward veterans and argue that this ostensible hostility causes difficulty for student veterans.<sup>9</sup> My analysis shows that veterans' academic challenges are caused not by collegiate hostility toward the military but by multiple factors, including disjunctions between veterans' military training and academic demands, and psychological trauma engendered by their experiences in war. My analysis also shows that student veterans are challenged by pervasive cultural expectations that they should serve as venerated representatives of the current wars, and that these cultural expectations form part of a growing militarized common sense on campuses. The assertion that college campuses are hostile to veterans is not only unwarranted but also harmful, inhibiting critical analysis of military projects and generating silent consent to war. This silencing erases veterans' lived experiences, including those that may give rise to their own critiques of war.

### Veterans and Higher Education

This book is a meditation on the interplay between civilian academic and military worlds, but it didn't start out that way. It began as a research project about veterans in higher education and ended up as an exploration of social processes of militarization and education. I began the research as an attempt to understand a jarring statistic I heard quoted in 2008: 96 percent of all recruits had signed up for GI Bill educational benefits upon enlistment, but only a small fraction (8 percent according to one study) of those who signed up actually made use of their benefits.<sup>10</sup> Though this number changed significantly after 2008, I decided to explore the reasons for this disparity as well as the obstacles faced by war veterans in college.<sup>11</sup>

Narratives of the returning soldier have fueled popular and political imaginations since Homer's *Odyssey*. After every U.S. war, veterans have returned from combat to reenter noncombatant communities, where their presence is utilized for different purposes: to reaffirm national identity, to become symbols of national strength and protection, or conversely—particularly in the case of veterans returning from World War I and the war in Vietnam—as symbols of government neglect. The body and welfare of the returning soldier-cum-veteran becomes a “contested site where memory, biography and personal histories call

attention to, challenge and resist unified and traditional versions of American identity and government.”<sup>12</sup>

The esteem in which veterans historically have been held by society has been reflected in a system of pensions and bonuses, developed in response to shifting political will and military necessity.<sup>13</sup> From widows’ pensions to ceremonial burials to college tuition, veterans’ bonuses have been used in various capacities: as inducements to enlist, wages for soldiers’ labor, and remediation for wounds suffered in battle. Prior to the Civil War, soldiers received military bonuses of land and money. After the Civil War, veterans received cash bonuses for fighting. World War I veterans came home to a contracted economy, no jobs, and no land grants, and they rebelled.<sup>14</sup>

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944—commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, or simply the GI Bill—provided returning veterans with social supports for civic and economic engagement, including housing, education, and health care.<sup>15</sup> World War II veterans were not only welcomed home as heroes and hailed as the Greatest Generation, they were also the beneficiaries of one of the largest federal wealth redistribution initiatives in U.S. history.<sup>16</sup> Popular and scholarly accounts of the history of the GI Bill reflect a discourse of reverence for World War II soldiers who returned victorious from what was embraced by civilians as the “Good War.” The original GI Bill was rooted in the idea of veteran exceptionalism, the belief that military veterans deserve benefits other citizens do not because they had sacrificed by going to war. The legislation reflected a New Deal approach to social welfare, providing special benefits to members of the armed forces who, as stated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, make “greater economic sacrifice and every other kind of sacrifice than the rest of us, and are entitled to definite action to help take care of their special problems.”<sup>17</sup>

The dominant narrative of the World War II era described military service as a democratizing force that prepared young recruits for educational and economic success. Military service, it was said, provided both the means and method of preparing young (male) Americans to return to participation in civilian life.<sup>18</sup> Military training was positioned as a transformative process. By instilling values of discipline, patriotism, heroism in combat, duty, and citizenship, military service was supposed to turn unformed young boys into college-bound men. In this narrative, war was a catalyst and crucible for men’s character, regardless of background.<sup>19</sup>

This narrative shifted significantly alongside changes in the U.S. political economy. The end of military conscription in 1973 made the decision to join the military a vocational option rather than a civic duty, and the erosion of New

Deal policies shifted the political tide against government entitlements.<sup>20</sup> The clear popular support for military conflicts enjoyed by the U.S. government during World War II did not persist for other conflicts.

Many Americans believe that U.S. military service is a route to upward social mobility, an equalizer of economic opportunity, and guarantor of higher education. Historical narratives of social mobility and economic opportunity are interwoven with narratives of wartime military service, but with the end of mandatory conscription in 1973, military service became even more closely linked to the promises of educational opportunity and social mobility.<sup>21</sup> Today, many high school students and young adults enlist in the armed forces to access college funding. Recruiters promise that military service will pay for college and prepare young men and women to attend.<sup>22</sup> However, many veterans never realize this promise. The low rates of utilization of educational benefits reported in 2008 indicated that returning war veterans were not enrolling in college, or they were dropping out before graduating. To try to understand this troubling trend, I began to study the experience of veterans on contemporary college campuses.

Much of the literature on war veterans in college identifies three major obstacles to veterans' success in higher education: First, there is a claim that military enlistees tend to be academically unprepared for college because many come from working-class backgrounds and choose military enlistment as an alternative to lower-wage jobs or unemployment.<sup>23</sup> Second, there is a claim that combat veterans face enduring symptoms of trauma that interfere with reintegration in civilian classrooms.<sup>24</sup> Third, some campus student affairs literature claims that civilian college campuses are unfriendly to the U.S. military, driving military veterans away from college.<sup>25</sup>

By limiting its focus to these three obstacles, the current literature ignores the structural causes of veterans' difficulties in college and assumes that military recruits are marked by intellectual and psychological deficits. The first claim that veterans may not be prepared for academic rigors of college is belied by the fact that many contemporary first-generation college student veterans successfully complete and excel in higher education. Moreover, military recruiters' promise of college education as a benefit of the military contract implies that regardless of background, service members should be able to take advantage of that benefit after discharge. As to the second claim, it is true that some veterans face enduring symptoms of combat trauma that interfere with reintegration in civilian classrooms.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, some student veteran participants in this research suffered from posttraumatic stress reactions that negatively affected their classroom performance. However, it is unlikely that war trauma is the major factor

in inhibiting postsecondary achievement, given the successes of GI Bill recipients from World War II and the Korean War.<sup>27</sup>

The final obstacle—unfriendly college campuses—was identified based on two unsupported assumptions: that civilian college campuses are antimilitary and that all veterans have uniformly positive associations with the institutional military. Regarding the first assumption, campuses such as Stanford, Harvard, and Columbia, having banned the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) during the heated Vietnam War protests of the 1960s and '70s have since welcomed back the ROTC and implemented robust veteran support programs, similar to many public colleges and universities across the country. As to the second assumption, many war veterans are highly ambivalent about the institutional U.S. military as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet the stereotype that many college campuses are antimilitary persists, forming part of a veteran support discourse on college campuses that venerates military policies and projects and silences debate about the wars.<sup>28</sup>

The chapters that follow show how, through everyday practices, militarism becomes part of the hidden curriculum of college life—in the ways teachers are instructed to treat veterans deferentially in their classrooms, and in their avoidance of talking about the wars for fear of offending veterans. Through analyzing the words of individual veterans, I trace larger narratives of war, military support, and public dissent to understand how military ideology is lived and practiced in daily life.

But what do we mean when we talk about militarism? The U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought about renewed discussions among social scientists regarding empire, militarism, and militarization. In the United States, “militarization” is most commonly used to refer to contexts of war, but this book argues that our everyday, domestic social world is also deeply militarized.<sup>29</sup>

Scholarly notions of militarism and militarization are contested and multifaceted. Lesley Merryfinch observed, “Like electricity, ‘militarism’ can best be described by its effects. When military goals, values and apparatus increasingly dominate a state’s culture, politics and economy, militarism is on the rise.”<sup>30</sup> Michael Mann broadens the concept of militarism beyond a narrow focus on military institutions to refer to “a set of attitudes and social practices which regard war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, militarization involves embedding military priorities into the civilian sphere; this entails shifts in both public consciousness and in social practices.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Edward P. Thompson warned against an overly narrow focus on concepts such as “the military-industrial complex” because this “suggests that [militarism] is confined in a known and limited place: it may threaten

to push forward, but it can be restrained, contamination does not extend through the whole societal body.”<sup>33</sup> Writing during the Cold War, Thompson observed, “the USA and the USSR do not have military-industrial complexes: they are such complexes.”<sup>34</sup>

Cynthia Enloe describes militarization as “a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing (such as an institution) gradually becomes controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but normal.”<sup>35</sup> Peter Kraska offers straightforward, if somewhat circular, working definitions for both militarism and militarization: “Militarism is a cultural pattern of beliefs and values supporting war and militarization that comes to dominate a society. Militarization is the preparation for that activity.”<sup>36</sup>

“War created the United States,” writes Michael Sherry, and although many Americans profess antipathy toward wars and war making, U.S. history has been shaped by militarism.<sup>37</sup> The U.S. government has deployed troops to fight in military conflicts—as leading proponents or in background roles—for most of its relatively brief history as a nation. From 1775 to 2015, troops of the U.S. armed forces were openly deployed in 315 foreign and domestic armed conflicts.<sup>38</sup> These include not only U.S. wars considered by historians and the general public to be major conflicts but also wars of expansion and annexation, military occupations, and conflicts to protect U.S. business interests abroad.<sup>39</sup>

While U.S. military engagement domestically and worldwide has been a near-constant feature of the nation’s history, the contemporary period is marked by a heightened sense of vulnerability and anxiety about U.S. national security. This has given rise to what Andrew Bacevich calls the “New American Militarism”: an era of permanent, preemptive war. Bacevich writes that prior to September 11, 2001, U.S. presidents had consistently claimed that the United States declared war solely as a last resort. However, after the 2001 attacks, George W. Bush called for a new military strategy in which the United States would no longer passively allow enemies to strike. Speaking at West Point Military Academy in 2002, G. W. Bush vowed to “take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge.”<sup>40</sup> Bacevich argues that this represents a fundamental shift in U.S. military policy in which going to war becomes a first, rather than a last, resort: “Bush’s remarks indicated that he was actually referring not to preemption, but to preventive war. This became the essence of the Bush Doctrine.”<sup>41</sup>

Wars are always destructive in terms of infrastructure and human life, to opposing combatants and to civilians caught in the crossfire. Since September 11,



2001, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to over 108,000 U.S. casualties, including 6,800 deaths (with 298 suicides), 45,889 wounded in action, and 56,874 other medical evacuations due to injury or disease.<sup>42</sup> U.S. soldiers died by rocket-propelled grenade fire and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—weapons responsible for approximately half of all deaths and injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. wartime casualties also include soldiers who died in vehicle crashes, from electrocutions, heatstroke, friendly fire, and battlefield suicides.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, casualties are not limited to, nor even most pronounced among, officially designated fighting troops. It is estimated that over 210,000 civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan have been killed or wounded as a result of U.S.-led military actions in these countries since 2001.<sup>44</sup>

According to Martin Shaw, militarism develops not only when war-making ideology is strong, but also more generally as military valorization affects social relations and practices.<sup>45</sup> In the past, military glorification was designed to rally public support for specific geopolitical conflicts, but the contemporary period is marked by perpetual and regionally diffuse wars, like those of the Global War on Terrorism. In this context, military valorization is infused into everyday civilian life. The institutional military is taken for granted as protective, necessary, and unquestionable.

Adopting Matthew Sparke's characterization of the Global South, my research found that militarism is "everywhere but always somewhere."<sup>46</sup> That is, even as militarism is omnipresent, its effects are felt in multiple specific sites. In particular, this book analyzes within the field of education the mechanisms that produce militarized common sense in individual soldiers, in supporters of military veterans, and in the academic institutions in which veterans enroll as students. It explores everyday militarism as social practice in which we all consent and participate.<sup>47</sup> This book raises the question: what social processes enable military-valorizing cultural patterns, beliefs, and values to take hold and become dominant, particularly at a time when the country is engaged in a series of unpopular wars?

The ideas of Italian cultural theorist Antonio Gramsci are helpful to understand the question of how ideas are adopted through cultural diffusion of common sense, by which Gramsci means the "incoherent set of generally held assumptions and beliefs" of conventional thought that becomes naturalized and taken for granted in society.<sup>48</sup> Through daily practices and habits, military valorization becomes embedded in daily practices and social relations. Yet while processes of militarization coincide with and are amplified by a generalized conservative entrenchment on college campuses, military-valorizing

assumptions and attitudes are not some kind of false consciousness imposed from above.<sup>49</sup> Rather, campus discourses of military valorization come from students, teachers, administrators, staff, and surrounding communities; they arise from and gratify a societal need to support and care for those sent to fight wars.

Gramsci wrote about periods of conservative entrenchment as periods when dominant logics, assumptions, and attitudes become “permanently consolidated, organized ideologically, and exalted lyrically” and that they become embedded in daily practices and relations.<sup>50</sup> This book traces ways in which militarist logics, assumptions, and attitudes become consolidated through college programs, organized ideologically through “best-practice” literature, and exalted lyrically in valorizing discourse that conflates those who fight wars with a unifying military mission. In doing so, this book explores the construction of unstated but operative alliances between military projects and the academy.

The production of militarized common sense creates social meaning and consent for military projects, and involves the creation of national and military identification within society. This process is facilitated by the promotion of what I call—borrowing from Michael Billig—“banal militarism,” or everyday symbols and practices that conflate the interests of the nation and its people with the interests of the military.<sup>51</sup> Billig’s notion of banal nationalism refers to manifestations of nationalist ideology in daily life. Symbols such as national flags, which are metaphors of both warfare and freedom, are used in everyday contexts, including classrooms, sporting events, children’s clothing, television advertising, and department store sales. The mobilization of these symbols in everyday life creates an imagined solidarity with the national project by conflating the interests of the nation-state with those of its citizenry. This occurs in commonplace practices and rituals; for example, the phrase “Our soldiers are fighting for our freedoms” produces affiliations and unities of interest among and between the civilian subject, the military subject, and the goals of the nation-state. Ritualized expressions of gratitude such as “Thank you for your service” express gratitude for service on military projects and implicitly assume a unity with military missions. These phrases articulate military interests with the everyday ideological habits, symbols, discourse, and practice surrounding veteran support. In doing so, these phrases both produce and are produced by militarized common sense on college campuses and in the broader civil society.

Many public stories are told about contemporary war veterans, yet these stories are portrayed through a narrow range of narratives. Designated the “New Greatest Generation” by Joe Klein in *Time* magazine, veterans are depicted

at times as heroes returning to a society that does not sufficiently appreciate military sacrifice; at other times they are portrayed as psychologically wounded and suicidal; at other times as violent and unstable.<sup>52</sup> In the midst of these public tropes about veterans, there are overlooked and untold stories about veterans' experience of war and of reincorporation into civilian society. Many veterans do experience psychological sequelae of combat trauma, but their personal stories are not reducible to that. While I did not start out to explore the effects of combat trauma in veterans, the topic surfaced in conversations because posttraumatic reactions formed part of participants' daily experience and affected their classroom performance. Veterans in this study did experience real and persistent psychological aftereffects of combat trauma, and for many of them, understanding the meaning of their suffering was intimately tied to understanding their own actions as combatants.

The cognitive, social, and emotional lives of many former soldiers are profoundly affected by combat stress. Since the American Psychiatric Association first included post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980, most research on the disorder has focused on trauma associated with threats to soldiers' lives and safety. Yet a growing body of literature acknowledges that veterans also experience psychological trauma from being perpetrators of wartime violence.<sup>53</sup> This research indicates that soldiers experience moral injury from "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."<sup>54</sup> Research carried out by the VA with Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans indicates that trauma arising from being both victim and perpetrator of violence has contributed to unprecedented high rates of suicide among former and current military members.<sup>55</sup>

Cultural anthropologists who examine connections between trauma, violence, and political community show that traumas produced by wars and repression are inscribed and reinscribed in everyday narratives.<sup>56</sup> Brison writes that the undoing of the self in trauma involves a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present, and typically an inability to envision the future. Many veterans in this study found that reentering civilian society and college required them to find ways to reconstruct themselves and carry on with a reconfigured life.<sup>57</sup>

For some veteran participants of this study, race and gender were a source of alienation from the military as well as a disjunction between military and civilian collegiate institutions. Culturally, the practice of soldiering in the U.S. military is racialized (white) and gendered (male).<sup>58</sup> Even as the current all-volunteer armed forces rely increasingly on racial and ethnic minority male

and female recruits and consciously and explicitly portray themselves as race and gender neutral, scholarship confirms that military practice is infused with the social construction of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity.<sup>59</sup> With the understanding that gendered and racialized perspectives shape institutional and informal military practices, I found that some gendered and racialized practices carried over into collegiate settings.<sup>60</sup>

There is a broad consensus among scholars that military institutional practice and wars are masculine social endeavors.<sup>61</sup> Enloe writes that nationalism and militarism typically spring from “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.”<sup>62</sup> Because it is not possible to study military practices without also understanding the male perspectives that historically shaped both institutional and informal conventions, this book explores experiences of both men and women soldiers and veterans through processes of basic training, deployments, and veterans’ organizations.

## The Study

Developing commonsense understandings of the world entails processes of learning and teaching in which individuals, groups, and institutions learn to adopt agreed-upon understandings as fact. This study focuses on multiple sites of learning to answer some key questions: How do civilians learn to become soldiers? What happens when soldiers leave the military, return to civilian life, and enroll in colleges as students? How does the presence of student veterans on campuses affect our understanding of veterans and the wars in which they fought? In what ways do veteran support efforts and relationships between campus actors (veteran advocates, college staff and administrators, academic instructors) and noncampus actors (community veteran support groups) shape discourse about the military? Answering these questions requires that we consider the broader implications of academic-military relationships.

This book uses ethnographic methods to explore the experiences and identities produced at the dynamic intersections of civilian, military, and student practices by focusing on processes and practices that socially make and unmake soldiers. In the context of military training, I examine sociocultural processes used to make soldiers, including participation, inculcation, sensemaking, and the legitimation and delegitimation of cross-border violence and racialized and masculinized nationalism. I examine what happens when soldiers return home and enter college—a site where their militarized identity is unmade and re-made as civilian-veteran—and the ways that combat-related physical and emotional trauma affect student veterans’ lives.

Laura Nader writes that tracing the less-visible ways in which complex systems of power operate within societies is a daunting task.<sup>63</sup> She calls for scholarly investigation into environments where individuals conduct their daily lives within systems that are designed, operated, and maintained by the institutionally powerful. The ethnographic method is appropriate for this type of inquiry. Ethnographies of power require that the researcher represent complex personal experiences without losing sight of the broader connections between the social and the individual. Ethnographic observation can be used to identify processes through which institutional power is exercised and normalized in the interplay between social structure and individual agency.<sup>64</sup> Ethnographies of power require the examination of unequal relations to identify what Nader calls “controlling processes”—the mechanisms through which ideas are taken up by individuals and institutions and become accepted relations of power.

Similarly, Catherine Lutz suggests that in ethnographies of empire, scholars may draw on the anthropological ethnographic tradition of person-centered contextual analysis to examine the processes through which imperial power is configured, reconfigured, maintained, and reinforced. Lutz argues that “empire is in the details,” as power takes root through lived, daily interactions.<sup>65</sup> Drawing on this tradition, I look at the production of militarized common sense in quotidian disciplinary practices, such as training to comply with commands from superiors or the application of the “Military Friendly” designation to particular campuses.<sup>66</sup> To understand how militarism operates culturally in daily life, I studied the relations between veterans, instructors, and veteran supporters in multiple sites. My analysis focused on the practices of unofficial knowledge production—knowledge that is assumed and naturalized, rather than officially quantified.

All individuals, institutions, and locations noted in this book are identified pseudonymously. While some participants said they would be happy to have their real names and affiliations used, others felt they could speak more freely knowing that their identities would not be made public.<sup>67</sup>

Over the course of three years, I attended public and private veteran support events and spoke to veterans on and off college campuses. To examine institutional military teaching practices, I spoke with recent veterans about their experiences in basic training, supplementing veterans’ recollections with a close study of Army training manuals. Next, to understand how college campuses receive recent war veterans, I spent three years in classrooms, veterans’ club meetings, and meetings with school administrators and community service providers. To learn about veterans’ perspectives on these support initiatives, I