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Fighting the Vietnam Syndrome: The Construction of a Conservative Veterans Politics, 1966-1984

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Charlotte Cahill

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ABSTRACT

Fighting the Vietnam Syndrome:
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Charlotte Cahill

In a 1980 campaign speech to veterans, Ronald Reagan declared that the United States suffered from a "Vietnam syndrome." The war in Vietnam, Reagan said, had harmed American political life and made the public wary of the aggressive foreign policies Reagan believed were necessary to win the Cold War. I argue that five presidential administrations developed a veterans politics meant to counteract the Vietnam syndrome. Their efforts drove a slow expansion of federal programs for veterans, assistance often more symbolic than substantive. Policymakers worked with a conservative cohort of vets to formulate what they termed an image of "healthy masculinity" for veterans by creating programs intended to redefine citizenship and masculinity. These initiatives reflected veterans' and policymakers' understandings of the impact of the Vietnam War on American politics and foreign relations. This politics of symbolism culminated in Reagan's efforts to fight the Vietnam syndrome and garner support for his agenda of Cold War re-militarization by glorifying the war and its veterans. The efforts of presidents as ideologically divergent as Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan to use veterans benefits to achieve their political ends reveal remarkable continuities in the exercise of executive power. After Vietnam, politicians and observers in the media conflated debates over veterans benefits with efforts to delineate the war's meaning and to construct memories of it.

Conservative veterans in turn used this trend to build their political and cultural capital. They embraced and expanded narratives that insisted those returning from Vietnam were ignored or mistreated, reinforcing the notion that Vietnam was a unique war and that extraordinary measures would be required to move beyond it. Efforts to eradicate the "Vietnam syndrome" through the creation of veterans programs ironically ensured the continued centrality of the Vietnam War in American political culture.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWOL Absent without leave, a designation generally applied to military deserters

BOB Bureau of the Budget

DAV Disabled American Veterans

LBJ Library Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library

MIA Missing in Action

NVOV Negro Veterans of Viet Nam

NVVC National Vietnam Veterans Coalition

POW Prisoner of War

PTSD Post-traumatic stress disorder

PVS Post-Vietnam syndrome (also called Vietnam veterans syndrome)

VA Veterans Administration or, after 1989, the Cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs

VFW Veterans of Foreign Wars

VVA Vietnam Veterans of America

VVAW Vietnam Veterans Against the War

VVI Vietnam Veterans Institute for Research and Advocacy

VVJP Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace

VVLP Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program

VVMF Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

WHCF White House Central File

WHORM White House Office of Records Management

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Introduction

Republican presidential nominee Ronald Reagan diagnosed a "Vietnam syndrome" afflicting the American body politic in an August 1980 speech to the national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). He defined the Vietnam syndrome as a product of Americans' "feelings of guilt" about a war that ended five years before and argued that the disease inhibited the formulation of aggressive foreign policies necessary in the Cold War world. It was time to reject the claims of the "North Vietnamese aggressors" that the United States was "bent on imperialistic conquests" and to recognize that American military intervention in Vietnam "was, in truth, a noble cause." Reagan declared that peace could be restored to the world through American re-militarization, which would create a "margin of safety in our military power which was so unmistakable that others would not dare to challenge us." It was therefore time for Americans to learn the "lesson" of Vietnam: "If we are forced to fight, we must have the means and the determination to prevail or we will not have what it takes to secure the peace. And while we are at it, let us tell those who fought in that war that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war our government is afraid to let them win."[1]

The inclusion of Vietnam veterans in Reagan's explanation of the "lesson" of the war was no coincidence, nor was the decision to make his case for re-militarization at a veterans convention. Reagan's efforts to fight the Vietnam syndrome and reshape domestic political culture depended on a fusion of veterans politics with his foreign policy agenda. His speech

[1] Ronald Reagan, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety," speech delivered at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention, Chicago, IL, 18 August 1980, http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html (accessed 14 November 2008).

followed the VFW's decision to abandon four decades of non-partisan advocacy and endorse Reagan's candidacy; it signaled the beginning of an important alliance. Reagan believed that veterans would provide a crucial base of support for his views on foreign relations: "Having known war, you are in the forefront of those who know that peace is not obtained or preserved by wishing and weakness. You have consistently urged maintenance of a defense capability that provides a margin of safety for America." Reagan denounced the Carter administration's allegedly paltry spending on veterans benefits as "unconscionable," the "height of hypocrisy," a "breach of faith," and the "cruelest betrayal," and promised to reward veterans for their support with a host of federal entitlements, including health care, disability compensation, education benefits, and veterans cemeteries. He posited a correlation between inadequate benefits and opposition to the conflict: "It has always struck me as odd that you who have known at firsthand the ugliness and agony of war are so often blamed for war by those who parade for peace."[2]

Reagan believed that expanded veterans programs would enable him to cure the Vietnam syndrome by reframing how Americans thought about veterans of the nation's most recent war and, by extension, the conflict itself. Veterans benefits would serve as a public symbol of the esteem in which Reagan held Vietnam veterans and encourage Americans to appreciate what he defined as the sacrifices demanded by military service. As president, Reagan's efforts on behalf of vets focused on initiatives that aimed to reshape former servicemen's collective image in response to what he—and veterans themselves—viewed as pervasive negative stereotypes of vets. Substantive benefits like health care quickly became secondary concerns. Reagan argued that Vietnam vets had been mistreated because Americans equated them with an unpopular war, and he hoped that the equation would work in reverse. He intended to use federal assistance

[2] Ibid.

programs to valorize veterans, and thus to alter perceptions of the war and eradicate the Vietnam syndrome.

Since "Vietnam syndrome" originated as a term closely associated with veterans, it was appropriate that Reagan hoped to use vets as a vehicle for his agenda. Reagan popularized the phrase, but he did not coin it. The expression emerged in the early 1970s as a catch-all description of the readjustment and mental health issues, later classified as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), that soldiers from Vietnam sometimes endured upon their return stateside. According to one psychologist who worked with veterans, these difficulties included guilt, rage, feelings of victimization, alienation, and "combat brutalization."[3] Reagan-era veterans programs were explicitly designed to counter suggestions that all veterans suffered from such problems. However, journalists and policymakers quickly expanded the meanings of the "Vietnam syndrome," using the term to describe the war's effects on not only veterans, but the American electorate. Definitions varied; the expression sometimes encompassed the impact of the war on American political culture, including the so-called credibility gap created by policymakers who hoped to conceal their actions in Vietnam and Watergate or partisan divisions exacerbated by debates about the conflict. President Richard Nixon argued that the Vietnam syndrome came from the "guilt-ridden carping" of liberal policymakers who led the nation to war, only to decide that defeat was inevitable, and thus "poisoned an already disillusioned American public."[4] However, "Vietnam syndrome" most often referred to the public resistance

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[3] Chaim F. Shatan, "Post-Vietnam Syndrome," *New York Times*, 6 May 1972, 35. For much of the 1970s, the terms "Vietnam syndrome" and "post-Vietnam syndrome" were used interchangeably. For an extended discussion of the development of the term, see chapter three of this dissertation.

[4] Richard Nixon, *The Real War* (New York: Warner Books, 1980), 114. For an overview of the development of the "credibility gap," see James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 771-790.

to aggressive U.S. foreign policy endeavors—especially the use of military force—allegedly engendered by the war in Vietnam.[5] Reagan was particularly concerned about its foreign policy implications, though he also suggested that the syndrome threatened his goal of "unit[ing] people of every background and faith in a great crusade to restore the America of our dreams."[6]

Reagan's understanding of the links between the Vietnam syndrome and veterans politics suggests an answer to the central questions of this dissertation: What effects did the war in Vietnam have on American politics and foreign policy, and how did policymakers and veterans confront those repercussions? I argue that Reagan's efforts drew on a history of fifteen years of veterans politics. Policymakers' efforts to shape the image of Vietnam vets, a tactic they believed would help them fight the Vietnam syndrome, drove an expansion of veterans benefits between 1966 and 1984. The efforts of presidents as ideologically divergent as Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan to use benefits for returning servicemen to achieve their political ends reveal remarkable continuities in the exercise of presidential power. Federal initiatives on behalf of vets were not the product of a supposed national tradition of rewarding veterans for their military service or of a concern for their material needs. Symbolism, not substance, was key to veterans programs because their primary aim was to reshape the image of vets and thus change how Americans thought about the war itself. This strategy relied heavily on rhetoric that conflated

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[5] For an interesting perspective on the relationship between the Vietnam syndrome and American foreign policy, see Geoff Simons, *The Vietnam Syndrome: Impact on US Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). For an analysis written while Reagan was popularizing the term, see George C. Herring, "The 'Vietnam Syndrome' and American Foreign Policy," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 57:4 (Autumn 1981), 594-612. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the notion of a "Vietnam syndrome" was especially favored by conservative supporters of a hawkish foreign policy. See, for example, Nixon, *The Real War* and Norman Podhoretz, *The Present Danger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980). For a recent analysis of these arguments, see Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9-73.

[6] Reagan, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety."

veterans with the war in which they fought. Veterans programs sought to respond to media coverage that created and reinforced stereotypes of returning servicemen as either hypermasculine "baby-killers" or, following the American defeat, as emasculated losers. Refined by officials across five presidential administrations, this politics of symbolism culminated in Reagan's efforts to glorify the war and its veterans in order to shore up support for his agenda of re-militarization.

Vets played an active role in this politics. They argued that their wartime service, during which they had proven themselves as men and citizens, entitled them to a host of federal benefits, including housing, employment programs, and medical care. Moreover, servicemen returned to a nation where various social movements, especially feminist and civil rights groups, were changing Americans' notions of citizenship. Diminished respect for military service and shifting attitudes toward citizenship, some vets claimed, destabilized assumptions about veterans' entitlements and their manhood, handicapping their claims to benefits accorded veterans of earlier wars. These men established a largely conservative grassroots movement that enlisted federal aid to combat such stereotypes, to craft an image of what they termed "healthy masculinity" for men who had served in the war, and to counterbalance many of the gains of the feminist and civil rights movements.[7]

Veterans politics suggested that the American war in Vietnam was more damaging to the nation than prior conflicts. Conservative veterans appropriated media narratives that suggested servicemen returning from Vietnam had been ignored or mistreated due to antiwar sentiment.[8]

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[7]The term "healthy masculinity" appears in John Wheeler, "Vietnam Veterans Gains," *New York Times*, 28 May 1984, 19.

[8] In the 1970s, the notion that an indifferent or actively hostile American public exacerbated the difficulties of Vietnam veterans' homecoming became a truism for many observers. Yet the experiences

They insisted that the federal entitlements granted them compared unfavorably with provisions for World War II veterans, a situation that signaled the unique place of Vietnam veterans in American culture. Yet because the strategies they developed in concert with federal officials relied on the conflation of veterans and the war, their claims reinforced narratives that suggested the conflict itself, widely seen as the first U.S. defeat in wartime, was unique. President Reagan and other leaders publicly insisted that the U.S. did not lose, at least militarily.[9] Those claims, which might have undermined cultural narratives about the singular nature of the war, made veterans politics all the more important.

Ultimately, conservative policymakers and veterans failed to achieve their goals, but they did have a lasting impact on American political culture. Debates over benefits paralleled debates over the war itself. Extraordinary measures, including expanded veterans benefits and broad recognition of the heroism of Vietnam vets, would be required to overcome the Vietnam syndrome. Within the logic of this politics of symbolism, former servicemen wielded political and cultural power precisely because of their status as veterans and their assertion that the war in which they fought marked a new era in U.S. history. When Reagan highlighted the concerns of

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of returning servicemen varied greatly and some formed alliances with members of the antiwar movement. Moreover, claims that Vietnam veterans' reception was singularly frosty often compared it with the alleged warmth with which servicemen returning from World War II were greeted. These comparisons romanticized the period after the Second World War and ignored important differences between the two wars, as well as the experiences of servicemen returning from the Korean War or conflicts before World War II. Both Jerry Lembcke and Christian Appy argue that, though homecomings may have been problematic, veterans were not always greeted with negativity. See Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) and Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 299-321. A collection of veterans accounts is in Bob Greene, *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned From Vietnam* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989).

[9] Robert J. McMahon, "SHAFR Presidential Address: Contested Memory: The Vietnam War and American Society, 1975-2001," *Diplomatic History* 26:2 (Spring 2002), 168-9. In *The Real War*, Nixon declared: "We had won the war militarily and politically in Vietnam. But defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory because we lost the war politically in the United States." See Nixon, *The Real War*, 114.

conservative vets on a national stage, veterans politics became an important part of American political culture. Ironically, then, conservative veterans politics did not defeat the Vietnam syndrome; they ensured the continued centrality of the war in American political life.

* * *

More than two million Americans served in Vietnam. Their average age was nineteen. Eighty percent of U.S. troops in Vietnam had no more than a high school education, and roughly the same proportion came from poor or working-class families. A third were drafted, and another third enlisted in order to avoid the draft. Roughly half of the men in combat units were draftees.[10] Veterans' lack of education or occupational training, as well as their youth, complicated their transitions to civilian life at the end of their service. Moreover, contemporary observers suggested that Vietnam vets faced acute and unprecedented readjustment problems because they had fought on the losing side. Veterans who believed the benefits granted them compared unfavorably with those received by other American veterans often echoed this claim.

However, veterans benefits, like many other American social programs, have provoked contentious debate since at least the Civil War. This dissertation applies the insights generated

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[10] Figures come from Appy, *Working-Class War*, 11-43, Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 319, and Kyle Longley, *Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 4. Young claims that 2.16 million men served in Vietnam, and 1.6 million—more than half—were in combat. However, Longley says that while 2.5 million served in Vietnam, the "hard fighting fell to roughly 300,000-500,000 young American men." Appy first says that the total for all personnel sent by the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations was three million, but later puts the number at two and a half million. The total number of young men in the "Baby Boom" generation dwarfs the number who actually served in Vietnam; over the course of the war, between 26 and 27 million became eligible for the draft.

by existing scholarship on veterans, gender, and the American welfare state to the Vietnam era. As in earlier periods, the benefits eventually extended to men returning from the war reinforced a definition of citizenship that exalted manhood and military service. However, programs for vets created in the 1970s and '80s departed radically from assistance offered to veterans of other conflicts. Whereas previous initiatives generally provided financial and health benefits, Vietnam vets received little in the way of tangible benefits. Instead, policymakers, often with the approval of veterans themselves, focused on creating programs that promised to remake the image of Vietnam vets.

Vietnam vets routinely compared the federal assistance available to them unfavorably with that provided to servicemen returning from World War II, but they largely ignored the similarities between their struggles and those of earlier generations of veterans to win compensation for their service.[11] After the Civil War, the Grand Army of the Republic worked closely with the Republican party to secure pensions and make veterans' voices heard in national politics.[12] They argued that entitlements served a patriotic purpose, for they would encourage public respect for ex-servicemen.[13] The efforts of veterans of the First World War to secure benefits were mocked as self-serving.[14] The American Legion, formed in 1919, worked with policymakers to portray the "returning war veteran as the most fitting beneficiary of federal

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[11] A useful overview of the experiences of American veterans is Richard H. Taylor with Sandra Wright Taylor, *Homeward Bound: American Veterans Return From War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007).

[12] Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952).

[13] Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

[14] Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, *The Wages of War: When America's Soldiers Came Home: From Valley Forge to Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 260-263.

largesse."[15] In so doing, the Legion (and fiscal constraints) overcame President Franklin D. Roosevelt's opposition to special considerations for veterans and his preference for an extensive New Deal welfare state that would have guaranteed employment, housing, and education to all citizens. Their efforts culminated in the passage of the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill of Rights.[16]

Veterans benefits have been a critical component of the welfare state in the modern United States and, from the Civil War era on, have worked to frame those who have served in the military as especially deserving citizens.[17] Pensions for Civil War veterans, their widows, and other dependents paved the way for a more elaborate structure of federal programs. "From the 1880s through the 1910s," Theda Skocpol argues, "federal veterans' pensions became the keystone of an entire edifice of honorable income supplements and institutional provision for many honorable Americans who were longstanding citizens."[18] Such benefits were viewed as

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[15] Anastasia Mann, *All for One, but Most for Some: Veteran Politics and the Shaping of the Welfare State during the World War II Era* (dissertation, Northwestern University, 2003), 2. Also see William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989).

[16] Davis R.B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 98-107. Also see Mann, *All for One*.

[17] I include veterans benefits in the welfare state because, like other forms of welfare, they are intended to provide financial assistance, housing, education, medical care, or employment to citizens. However, as Theda Skocpol has noted, "the word 'welfare' has a pejorative connotation in the United States. It refers to unearned public assistance benefits, possibly undeserved and certainly demeaning, to be avoided if at all possible by all 'independent,' self-respecting citizens." Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 5. My inclusion of programs for veterans in the "welfare state" is not intended to be derogatory; it is an attempt to highlight the lengthy and complex relationship between veterans assistance and other social programs. In this dissertation, I occasionally use the term "entitlements" when referring to veterans benefits; I do so because it is a common and readily understood term, not because I am attempting to establish a distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" recipients of government assistance.

[18] Ibid., 7.

the fulfillment of a "contract" between the government and those who had defended it and were "idealized as that which was justly due to the righteous core of a generation of men (and survivors of dead men)—a group that ought to be generously and constantly repaid by the nation for their sacrifices." This logic framed pension recipients as more "morally worthy" of support than other citizens.[19]

State assistance programs have also reinforced traditional gender roles and the notion that citizenship itself is gendered.[20] They have done so in part by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving beneficiaries of social programs. Military service and motherhood were the earliest criteria for judging who was worthy of federal aid.[21] The creation of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers at the end of the nineteenth century legitimated the idea of veterans entitlements and the notion of a "martial citizenship" available only to men.[22] Meanwhile, benefits created for mothers in the first third of the twentieth century reinforced family structures centered on a male breadwinner by assuming that women would be driven to seek assistance due to a loss of income following the death of a husband.[23] Linda Gordon has demonstrated that the 1935 Social Security Act further codified these gendered assumptions by creating a system of social programs that distinguished between "social insurance" for "deserving" wage-earning men and a "stingy and humiliating" system of "welfare" for the needy.

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[19] Ibid., 148-151.

[20] For an overview of the ways in which categories of gender and citizenship have been intertwined throughout the history of the United States, see Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right To Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

[21] Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 2.

[22] Patrick J. Kelly, *Creating A National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[23] Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

At the moment when "labor-market forces and cultural changes were allowing women and blacks to move onto the main track of citizenship, Social Security created a new hierarchy of social citizenship in which they were on the bottom again."[24] The GI Bill's provision of benefits to the predominately male veterans of World War II, as Lizabeth Cohen has shown, "buttressed a male-directed family economy by disproportionately giving men access to career training, property ownership, capital, and credit, as well as control over family finances, making them the embodiment of the postwar ideal of purchaser as citizen and limiting their wives' claim to full economic and social citizenship."[25] The generous provisions of this legislation were an aberration in the history of veterans entitlements, a fact little noted by most Vietnam veterans, who demanded compensation for their military service equal to that given those returning from World War II.

Vietnam vets often suggested that pervasive beliefs that they were damaged by their wartime service translated to a dearth of benefits, an argument that ignored continuities between their experiences and those of veterans of previous wars. Their claim rested on an assumption that the GI Bill was designed to reward the masculine, heroic service of World War II veterans. However, it was only during the first two years of that conflict that "the soldier or veteran seemed a specimen of American manhood, a good citizen in the postwar economy of the future, a selfless team player, and a beneficiary of his time in the military." By 1945, this understanding had changed dramatically. The returning soldier was more often framed as a "*victim* of his

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[24] Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 253-254.

[25] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 137-147. Jennifer E. Brooks's study of World War II veterans in Georgia offers an interesting analysis of how military service reinforced and complicated political, racial, and gender identities. See Jennifer E. Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

military superiors, of the horrors of war, or even, amid the abundant benefits of the GI Bill, of government neglect." This "victim image" defined veterans of the Korean War, as well, and was later applied to Vietnam veterans.[26]

Despite these similarities, developments in the Vietnam era complicated traditional routes to the creation of veterans entitlements and definitions of gendered citizenship. The first of these was the novel experience of defeat in wartime. Much contemporary media coverage suggested that, although veterans of the two world wars had suffered "shell shock" and "combat fatigue," Vietnam vets' readjustment problems were particularly acute because their service had ultimately been meaningless. Second, while other veterans benefits were created as the American welfare state expanded, the federal bureaucracy in the 1970s and '80s was ostensibly contracting, even as offers of assistance to ex-servicemen grew more generous. Finally, the successes of Second Wave feminism meant that many Americans were growing skeptical about the desirability of the type of militarized masculinity often implicitly sanctioned by veterans programs. Moreover, while the structure of earlier benefits reinforced gender norms, Vietnam era programs were explicitly designed to promulgate a particular understanding of masculinity.

Although veterans of other American wars also criticized the benefits available to them, the degree to which Vietnam vets' claims emphasized manhood was unprecedented. This dissertation positions veterans' struggles to secure federal benefits as a key site for redefinitions of citizenship and manhood; it does not aim to define masculinity, nor does it posit a "crisis of

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[26] Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture From the Second World War To the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 275-78. Huebner's work traces the construction of a "warrior image" in the second half of the twentieth century by examining depictions of veterans in the press and in various cultural texts. He concludes that the "victim image" has been the defining characteristic of veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

masculinity" in the Vietnam era.[27] The war in Vietnam fractured cultural connections between masculinity and military service; vets who sought to rebuild that link shaped the relationship between veterans and the state.[28] By tracing the multiple ways in which Americans in the Vietnam era debated and framed the meanings of masculinity and citizenship, this study departs from what historical scholarship exists on gender, the military, and Vietnam. Most such work has relied on cultural texts to provide evidence for arguments about the gendered nature of American society or politics.[29] This approach, however, encourages the elision of the

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[27] Scholarly work on similar topics often identifies a "crisis of masculinity" that demands explanation or elaboration. See, for example, Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994). As K.A. Cuordileone has observed, however, "the criteria by which to adjudge a historical 'crisis' is entirely subjective, and it may not be a useful historical designation at all." See K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 15. Cuordileone does, however, note that political and cultural discourses of the 1950s posited a "crisis of masculinity." For further consideration of the usefulness of this notion as an analytical tool, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11. For a general account of changing conceptions of masculinity in the United States, see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

[28] My methodology draws on a recent collection of essays that takes as its starting point the notion that "military masculinities" are a useful lens through which to examine the "complex and variable relations of identities and the state." See Jeff Hearn, "Foreword: On Men, Women, Militarism, and the Military," in Paul R. Higate, ed., *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*, (London: Praeger, 2003), xii. One study that has provided a useful methodological model for examining the impact of war on constructions of gender is Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing gender in postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Roberts examines debates about women in postwar France as a "set of responses to the war's impact on French culture and society," 4. In so doing, she utilizes Joan Scott's insights into how discourses regarding gender illuminate other issues of interest to historians. See Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[29] Examples of work on how a concern with masculinity played a role in political and cultural discourses about the war Vietnam include Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); J. Justin Gustainis, *American rhetoric and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993); Fabian Hilfrich, "Manliness and 'Realism:' The Use of Gendered Tropes in the Debates on the Philippine-American and on the Vietnam Wars, " in Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds., *Culture and International History* (New York: Berghahn Publishers, 2003), 60-78; James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); and Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* and *The Remasculinization of America*

experiences of individual veterans, and, more importantly, the roles they played in instigating political and cultural changes. Close attention to archival sources highlights the impact of individuals and interest groups in politics. Susan Jeffords, for example, has argued that the media asserted the masculinity of Vietnam vets by contrasting them with a government that many Americans viewed as "feminized."[30] Yet many veterans worked with the government to create what they termed "masculine" identities.

While this dissertation seeks to explain how policymakers attempted to use the issues swirling around Vietnam veterans to contain the impact of the war, it departs from most other studies of "collective memory" and the "legacy" of Vietnam. Like scholarship on gender and the war, they have generally employed methodologies common in cultural studies, particularly close readings of texts.[31] This work has yielded fascinating analyses of cultural products, but it has

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(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). An extensive body of scholarship examines the links between masculinity and military service. A helpful recent overview is Robert A. Nye, "Western Masculinities in War and Peace," *American Historical Review* 112:2 (April 2007), 417-438**.** Also see Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Loren Baritz, *Backfire: a history of how American culture led us into Vietnam and made us fight the way we did* (New York: W. Morrow, 1985) and Charles C. Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970). For scholarship that offers a fascinating look at how ideas about masculinity influenced decisions to enlist in the military and shaped soldiers experiences while in Vietnam, see Appy, *Working-Class War*.

[30] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*.

[31] Examples include Keith Beattie, *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Jeffords, *Hard Bodies and The Remasculinization of America*; Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*; Andrew Martin, *Receptions of War: Vietnam in American Culture* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Richard Morris and Peter Ehrenhaus, eds., *Cultural Legacies of Vietnam: Uses of the Past in the Present* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1990); Charles E. Neu, ed., *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, *The*

often ignored the roles of individuals in producing and understanding culture and does not always offer satisfying explanations of political processes. As Michael Allen has observed, "Its palpable alienation and excessive moralism precluded any serious attempt to understand the behavior…of the historical actors who constructed such a roiling and contentious memory of the wartime past."[32] Allen's work on the Vietnam era POW/MIA movement has greatly influenced my approach to both the politics of the period and the relationship between war and memory. Additional useful work on war and memory has focused on other wars and other countries. David Blight, for example, has shown how contests over memories of the Civil War—memories that veterans played an important role in shaping—were very real struggles for power.[33]

Vietnam War and American Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); and Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994). Two especially useful cultural interpretations of the domestic impact of the war are Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998) and Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Patrick Hagopian analyzes the construction of memory through the design of veterans memorials and collections of oral narratives of Vietnam veterans. See Patrick Hagopian, *The Social Memory of the Vietnam War* (dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1994).

[32] Michael Joe Allen, *"The War's Not Over Until The Last Man Comes Home": Body Recovery and the Vietnam War* (dissertation, Northwestern University, 2003), 11. My understanding of the literature on collective memory and my summary of it here are deeply indebted to the useful analysis of the subject offered in Allen's introduction. See Allen, 9-13.

[33] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001). Other useful studies are Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991); and Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996). For other work that provides a useful methodological model, as well as interesting points of comparison between defeated nations—the U.S. in the wake of Vietnam and Japan after World War II—see Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); and Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Beatrice Trefalt's work has also been very helpful. The "stragglers" from the Japanese Imperial Army, who received a chilly reception upon their eventual return to a nation trying to move beyond its loss in war, have much in common with the Vietnam veterans discussed here. See Beatrice Trefalt, *Japanese Army Stragglers and Memories of the War in Japan, 1950-1975* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

This project joins the work of scholars who have suggested that it is necessary for political and diplomatic historians to consider the war's repercussions, heeding historian Robert McMahon's declaration that the "study of the Vietnam War and national memory is…far too important a subject for foreign relations specialists to abandon to the cultural historians, the cultural studies specialists, and the political polemicists."[34] Robert D. Schulzinger argues that the "living legacy" of the conflict can be seen in international affairs and domestic culture and has examined the various "lessons" that Americans have drawn from the it. He persuasively suggests that Vietnamese communities in the U.S. and veterans played an important role in perpetuating those legacies. In particular, Schulzinger contends that narratives about mythologized veterans—and especially about former POWs—replaced concerns about defeat in the public imagination.[35] Michael Allen's work, which centers on POW/MIA activists, offers insight into how the "politics of body recovery" allowed Americans to contest the meanings of the war and its legacies. Government officials, Allen argues, sought to use this politics to unite the nation, while demands for a full accounting of POWs and MIAs provided an opportunity to assign blame for the costs of the war and to reinforce concerns about the abandonment of veterans.[36] Finally, Edwin Martini's research suggests that the Vietnam War did more than influence American politics and culture; it continued after 1975. He claims that, after the war's official end, the U.S. adopted various "punitive policies" toward Vietnam intended to rewrite the history of American involvement and to marginalize Vietnamese voices and experiences. This

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[34] McMahon, "SHAFR Presidential Address," 184.

[35] Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time For Peace: Legacies of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). See pages 73-110 for Schulzinger's discussion of veterans and memory.

[36] Allen, *The War's Not Over*.

"American war on Vietnam was thus as much a battle for the cultural memory of the war in American society as it was a lengthy and bitter economic, political, and diplomatic war against the people of Vietnam."[37]

As this new scholarship demonstrates, the archival and institutional sources favored by political and diplomatic historians offer new insight into the politics of a period that most scholars have understood in terms of broad cultural trends. My research at the Johnson, Ford, Carter, and Reagan Presidential Libraries, and in the Nixon Presidential Materials at the National Archives, shows how and why officials in five presidential administrations responded to demands for expanded benefits for veterans. Articles in the popular press and the records of various veterans groups illustrate how negative stereotypes developed and why vets' strategies of framing their concerns in terms of masculinity were effective. This methodology demonstrates that seemingly amorphous cultural constructs, particularly of gender and masculinity, were grounded in politics. It is not my aim to provide a detailed account of the numerous programs for Vietnam veterans created between 1966 and 1984, or to recount every debate over the parameters of those initiatives.[38] Rather than assume that federal assistance is a natural corollary to military service, I employ a case study approach to explain the specific political and cultural considerations that encouraged the creation of benefits for Vietnam vets.

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[37] Edwin A. Martini, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 2.

[38] For an account that offers much of this detail, see Gerald Nicosia, *Home To War: A History of the Vietnam Veterans' Movement* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001). An excellent overview of veterans politics in the late 1970s and 1980s is Wilbur J. Scott, *Vietnam Veterans Since the War: The Politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and the National Memorial* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

The cohort of veterans at the center of this study was largely conservative.[39] Their conservatism was complicated by their enthusiastic endorsement of federal assistance, not to mention state efforts to shape notions of gender, but they aimed to use these initiatives to achieve conservative ends. Though they favored state assistance for ex-servicemen, including veterans preferences in federal hiring, they generally opposed other social programs. Moreover, they believed that their need for government aid was only temporary. Once public perceptions had changed, they argued, employers would let go of their prejudices against vets, putting them on an equal footing with other job-seekers. Veterans also opposed changes, including the expansion of citizenship rights, brought about by feminist and civil rights activists; these shifts seemed to some to threaten veterans' claims as specially entitled citizens. They feared that programs such as affirmative action would undermine hiring preferences for vets and clung to the male breadwinner family model as women entered the workforce in greater numbers. Veterans also claimed that feminist efforts to reshape Americans' understandings of gender were largely responsible for the criticisms endured by returning soldiers. In response, they argued for the value of a traditional, militarized masculinity that emphasized patriotism, duty, courage, and the ability to support a family. Vets who endorsed this politics generally embraced Republican

[39] The small body of scholarship on the Vietnam veterans movement has focused largely on the progressive Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). See, for example, Andrew E. Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); and Nicosia, *Home To War*. VVAW, along with allies in the New Left, questioned traditional images of military masculinity and promoted the notion of the "New Soldier," a veteran who embraced the values and goals of the men's liberation movement. See Kerri Lynn Manning, *No More John Waynes: Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Cold War Era Masculinity* (dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2003).

politicians; many identified with the rapidly expanding conservative movements of the 1960s and 1970s and applauded the hawkish foreign policy aims of neoconservatives.[40]

These veterans worked with policymakers who sought to reverse political trends arising from the social and cultural tensions of the 1960s and the divisions caused by the war in Vietnam. The "credibility gap" that opened up between political leaders and much of the public was exacerbated by Watergate and created "doubts…about the postwar rise of large, centralized government."[41] As the postwar liberal consensus shattered, many Americans believed that "intimations of decline were everywhere to be heard and seen in the early 1970s—as the war ground toward defeat, as the Watergate cover-up unraveled, as the Arab oil embargo humiliated a seemingly impotent nation, as the economy worsened. Even those who could not point to specific political events…felt that something had passed—that the American Century, however abbreviated, had ended."[42] Moreover, the Vietnam syndrome led some Americans to argue that

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[40] The literature on this subject has grown almost as rapidly as the movements themselves. A starting point is Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *The American Historical Review*, 99:2 (April 1994) and the response, Leo P. Ribuffo, "Why is There so Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Known anything about It?" *The American Historical Review*, 99:2 (April 1994). Bruce Schulman provides a good overview of the growing power of conservatives in the 1970s; see Bruce Schulman *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001). Other useful studies include: John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: The Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Mary Brennan, *Turning Right in the 1960s: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); David Hoeveler, Jr. *Watch on the Right: Conservative Intellectuals in the Reagan Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Gary L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

[41] Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, viii.

[42] Schulman, *The Seventies*, 48-49.

the United States should never again intervene in the governance of a distant nation, while others posited that the lesson of Vietnam was that the United States should always commit its full military strength in wartime.[43]

An examination of veterans politics reveals striking continuities in the exercise of presidential power. Though members of Congress routinely introduced legislation that would have provided health and education programs similar to those created for World War II veterans, the inhabitants of the White House frequently rejected those proposals in favor of initiatives, funded and administered by departments in the executive branch, that sought to change perceptions of vets.[44] Reagan's attempts to reclaim Vietnam as a "noble cause" are well-known. Yet scholarly accounts have not fully analyzed how systematic these efforts were or demonstrated Reagan's willingness to make a sustained financial, as well as rhetorical, commitment to them.[45] Recent scholarship has argued that "we have to be impressed by the

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[43] Ibid., 221-222.

[44] Mark Boulton's work focuses on Congressional efforts to provide benefits to Vietnam veterans in the face of what he characterizes as an "obstructionist White House, influenced by a parsimonious Bureau of the Budget and Office of Management and Business, and a less than munificent Veterans Administration." See Mark Boulton, *A Price on Freedom: The Problems and Promise of the Vietnam Era G.I. Bills* (dissertation, University of Tennessee—Knoxville, 2005), 12. Boulton thus attributes executive reluctance to back Congressional measures to budgetary concerns. However, his study, which provides a very thorough overview of legislators' efforts on behalf of vets, pays little attention to programs created by other means. Boulton notes that negative stereotypes of Vietnam veterans abounded, but he argues that they contributed to the difficulties vets had in securing benefits and suggests that they may also account for scholarly inattention to Vietnam era entitlements. Ibid., 7-12.

[45] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*; Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and John Ehrman, *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

sheer magnitude of the changes" that led from sixties radicalism to Reagan-era conservatism.[46] While important shifts did occur in American politics in the 1970s, I argue that the notion of a "Reagan Revolution" overstates their scope.

Shifting definitions of the Vietnam syndrome, from a veterans problem to a matter of foreign policy, reflect the ways in which an understanding of the conflict's domestic consequences is essential for historians of American foreign relations. Efforts to deploy veterans politics to contain the Vietnam syndrome were part of what Robert McMahon has called a "struggle over societal memories of the Vietnam War, a struggle with enormous foreign policy implications."[47] In the last two decades, historians of American foreign relations have become increasingly attentive to the ways in which Cold War policies affected domestic events and attitudes, as well as the role culture has played in shaping Cold War ideologies.[48] As Jussi M. Hanhimäki has argued, "domestic politics…has always mattered a great deal in the making and

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[46] Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 4. Similar arguments about the supposedly sharp differences between the politics of the 1960s and those of the Reagan years can be found in Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1982); David Frum, *How We Got Here* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and Schulman, *The Seventies*. For an assessment of the "Reagan Revolution," see Troy, *Morning in America*.

[47] McMahon, "SHAFR Presidential Address," 163.

[48] For a variety of interpretations of how culture worked in the Cold War, see Christian G. Appy, ed., *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1955* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.) A survey of some of the literature on culture and the Cold War is Robert Griffith, "The Cultural Turn in Cold War Studies," *Reviews in American History* 29 (2001). In recent years, however, some historians have begun to urge caution, arguing that some of this work has ignored longer term trends and continuities in American history and has tended to see the United States in the second half of the twentieth century as defined entirely by the national security state. For an excellent summary of this historiography, see Laura McEnaney, "Cold War Mobilization and Domestic Politics: United States," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.)

shaping of American foreign policy."[49] While studies that integrate culture into the history of the Cold War have proliferated, diplomatic historians and scholars of public policy have rarely collaborated, though such interaction would strengthen both fields.[50] Indeed, such interactions are essential, as this study indicates by showing how federal officials worked to shape American culture and domestic public policy in order to advance their foreign policy aims.

The ways in which veterans politics intersected with foreign relations were complex. Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon resisted benefits programs in order to downplay the costs—in both money and manpower—exacted by the war. Yet Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan eagerly supplied support for programs that they thought would eradicate the Vietnam syndrome. And even as Reagan sought to defeat the Vietnam syndrome through veterans politics, it shaped his foreign policy. He insisted that public resistance to a military commitment to El Salvador in 1981 was the product of the Vietnam syndrome, while in 1983 Reagan suggested that the invasion of Grenada by U.S. Marines would help Americans move beyond the war in Vietnam.

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As he campaigned for the presidency, Ronald Reagan promised that, if elected, he would reverse the Vietnam syndrome and erase negative stereotypes of veterans. Reagan's speech to

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[49] Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Global Visions and Parochial Politics: The Persistent Dilemma of the 'American Century,'" *Diplomatic History* 27:4 (September 2003), 446.

[50] Robert McMahon has offered a compelling call for such collaboration. See Robert J. McMahon, "Diplomatic History and Policy History: Finding Common Ground," *Journal of Policy History*, 17:1 (2005), 93-109.

the VFW introduced many Americans to the notion of a "Vietnam syndrome" and revealed the ways in which Reagan feared that it would hinder an aggressive foreign policy agenda. He argued that Americans could not be assured of peace in the world until they understood that the lesson of Vietnam was not that the U.S. should avoid commitments abroad. Indeed, the lesson was precisely the opposite: it was essential that the American public lend support to necessary interventions overseas.[51] The alliance between Reagan and conservative veterans was largely successful in replacing narratives that suggested veterans were damaged with rhetoric about the manly heroism of those who served in Vietnam. At the 1984 dedication of the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Reagan applauded the "patriots who lit the world with their fidelity and their courage. They were both our children and our heroes. We will never forget their devotion and their sacrifice."[52]

Yet five years after Reagan's election, and ten years after the end of the Vietnam War, the Vietnam syndrome persisted. Secretary of State George P. Schultz reiterated Reagan's assertion that the U.S. fought for a "noble cause" and urged a reassessment of the war as an important first step in the formulation of future American policies. In a 1985 speech, Schultz, like Reagan in 1980, affirmed that vets had "suffered abuse." "Like their fathers before them, they fought for what Americans have always fought for," Shultz proclaimed, "freedom, human dignity, and justice. They are heroes. They honored their country, and we should show them our gratitude."[53] Schultz's inclusion of veterans emphasized the interconnectedness of former

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[51] Reagan, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety."

[52] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Statue," 11 November 1984, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1984, Book II (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 1820-22.

[53] Quoted in McMahon, "SHAFR Presidential Address," 169.

servicemen and the conflict in Vietnam, while his rhetoric about vets' heroism reflected the success of efforts to rehabilitate veterans' collective image. Yet that success simultaneously undermined Schultz's suggestion that the nation should move beyond the war in Vietnam. As veterans politics became a key part of national political conversations, conservative veterans gained cultural and political influence, which they retained more than thirty years after the conflict's end. Ironically, attempts to fight the Vietnam syndrome ensured that the war would remain at the heart of American politics.

Chapter 1: Average American Boys

Elizabeth D. Grisillo, the mother of a Marine serving in Vietnam, wrote to President Lyndon Johnson in July 1965 to plead with the president on behalf of her youngest son. While home on leave, he had discussed a proposed GI Bill of Rights for Vietnam veterans with his parents, and told them: "It would help a lot if we felt we had something to come back to and felt that somebody gives a damn about us." Elizabeth Grisillo had written to Johnson, she explained, because: "With all due respect, Mr. President, you above all people should give a damn…it was your decision that sent them there."[1] Grisillo was not alone in appealing to the president for a benefits package for Vietnam veterans, but Johnson continued to object to the proposed legislation, despite a warning from an aide that the issue had "wide emotional appeal" and broad Congressional support for legislation that would grant education benefits to servicemen returning from Vietnam.[2]

Johnson opposed the bill because he feared it would undermine his efforts on two major policy fronts. First, he believed that federal assistance to vets represented an acknowledgement that veterans were specially-entitled citizens, an admission Johnson believed would compromise his efforts to create Great Society programs benefiting all Americans. Second, Johnson argued that the existence of entitlements comparable to those created at the close of World War II would signal that the U.S. was enmeshed in a full-scale war in Vietnam. Questions surrounding

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[1] Letter from Elizabeth D. Grisillo to the President, 22 July 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-10/14/65, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[2] Memo from Philip S. Hughes to Lee C. White, 5 June 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

veterans programs thus intersected two of the most important policy issues of the 1960s. The Johnson administration's opposition to vets benefits ran counter to its overall embrace of federal entitlements. Its position was motivated by an ideology that focused on the President's broad political agenda rather than on specific veterans issues.

Yet outside the White House, there was relatively little debate about veterans benefits in the mid-1960s, a situation tied to media representations of American troops in Vietnam. The administration's objections notwithstanding, Congress passed the Cold War GI Bill in 1966, and Johnson, fearful that a veto would provoke a public backlash, signed it. The bill, which attracted relatively little comment, was presented in the press as a logical corollary to the valorous service of American personnel. This assumption was fueled in part by media coverage, common in the early years of American involvement in Southeast Asia, that presented American troops as masculine, heroic figures.

However, the increasing unpopularity of the war in the late 1960s, reflected in accounts of the activities of personnel stationed in Vietnam, ignited a lively debate over veterans benefits. In early 1968, the Tet Offensive decisively turned the tide of American public opinion against the war.[3] In November 1969, Americans learned that soldiers had brutally murdered Vietnamese women and children in a hamlet named My Lai. This revelation, which contributed to the war's growing unpopularity, dramatically curtailed positive press reports on the activities of American

[3] The Tet Offensive, launched at the end of January 1968, was a series of coordinated attacks by North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front forces at sites throughout Vietnam. Though caught off guard, American forces responded vigorously and eventually won a military victory. However, the attack disheartened many Americans, who believed the offensive proved that the U.S. was not as close to victory as policymakers had promised. Three months before Tet, 50 percent of Americans believed the U.S. was winning the war; after Tet, only 33 percent did. Young, *Vietnam Wars*, 216-227.

soldiers.[4] Accounts of pervasive morale problems, particularly drug use, among American servicemen suggested these patterns of behavior would continue when the troops returned home.[5] Furthermore, unhappy soldiers were supposedly undermining American efforts to win support in South Vietnam through their mistreatment of and brutality toward Vietnamese civilians. Commentators and veterans began to draw on these perceptions of vets to argue that current levels of federal funding for veterans programs were unacceptable. Observers suggested that a tour of duty in Vietnam was a transformative experience: Heroic young patriots went off to battle, but damaged men prone to drug addiction or violence returned in their stead. Proponents of an expansion of benefits argued not that they were earned through military service, but that veterans needed help. Education and employment benefits, they said, could heal men damaged by the war.

These debates over federal assistance to, and media representations of, Vietnam vets sketched the contours of a veterans politics that would emerge over the next two decades. Johnson's resistance to the 1966 GI Bill stemmed from a desire to advance a sweeping domestic agenda and his fear that the passage of the legislation would hinder the efficacy of interventions abroad. Media coverage of soldiers in Vietnam and the war's veterans paralleled increasingly

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[4] Andrew Huebner argues that "as the conflict lost public support, journalistic sympathy with the individual soldier remained steadfast or grew stronger." Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 175. This sympathy, he suggests, extended to the public, which saw soldiers and veterans as victims of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. It may be true that press coverage that focused on vets and their problems was intended to be sympathetic. However, as both Huebner's research and my own demonstrate, it actually tended to render vets as objects of pity, fear, or scorn. Moreover, many vets believed that commentary in the media exacerbated their problems. The push for benefits was intended to counteract media narratives.

[5] For an extensive discussion of the experiences of combat soldiers on the ground in Vietnam, see Appy, *Working-Class War*, 117-297. For more on the politics of dissent in the Vietnam-era military, see Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Richard Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

critical coverage of the war itself. Disputes over benefits that took shape in the 1960s reflected both the potential of veterans benefits to help or hinder the president's agenda and the ways in which demands for expanded benefits reflected concerns regarding vets' collective image.

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Senator Ralph Yarborough's 1965 call for a Cold War GI Bill suggested that veterans were naturally entitled to an expansive benefits package. He asked for public support for his proposal "in the name of both justice and common sense." He noted that the 1944 GI Bill had created a generation of highly-educated veterans who had contributed to the nation through their work as engineers, scientists, and teachers and argued that Vietnam veterans could do likewise through federally-funded education programs. Moreover, Yarborough claimed, men who fought in Vietnam had earned such rewards through their service to the nation.[6] Yarborough, who was elected to the Senate from Texas in 1957 and served there with Lyndon Johnson, knew the President well and urged him to support veterans benefits. However, despite bipartisan Congressional support for a new GI Bill, the Johnson administration resisted the legislation, which intersected with two critically important policy realms. White House officials feared the bill would derail both the Great Society and the achievement of American objectives in Vietnam.

In formulating its objections to Yarborough's proposal, the Johnson White House suggested that such benefits would duplicate services provided under the aegis of the Great

[6] Ralph Yarborough, "A Fair Deal for the Cold War Soldier," *Harper's*, January 1965, 82-3. Mark Boulton has examined the tensions between Congress and the White House on the subject of the Cold War GI Bill in great detail. See Boulton, *A Price On Freedom*, 57-88.

Society. Johnson hoped to create a universal education program through a package of grants and loans that would enable all Americans to attend college. This initiative, he argued, rendered unnecessary education benefits like those proposed by Yarborough. In an attempt to deflect criticism, Johnson claimed the 1944 GI Bill as inspiration for his education program. He argued: "The GI Bill challenges us to programs of loans and scholarships enabling every young man and woman who has the ability to move beyond the high school level. So I think we just must not rest until each child—GI or not GI, boy or girl, rich or poor—has the opportunity to get the kind of education that he needs and that his country needs for him to have in order for him to defend it."[7]

White House officials worried that a GI Bill would promote gender inequities in access to higher education. Samuel Halperin, a member of the team working on legislative proposals for the Great Society, noted: "Girls would not be benefited unless they were veterans, yet out of a current armed forces active-duty level of 2.7 million persons, there are only 30,000 women." He speculated that the promise of veterans benefits might "substantially increase the number of women who desire to serve in the Armed Services," but "most young women will have to seek educational aid elsewhere." Still, Halperin concluded, a "new GI Bill represents not an end but a major step toward our overall objective."[8] However, Sam Hughes of the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) insisted that "an expensive program only for ex-servicemen undercuts the strategy of persuading the Congress to begin to assure full educational advantages for all…Such a program

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[7] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks in Boca Raton at the Dedication of Florida Atlantic University," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1963-64, Book II, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 1428-1432.

[8] Memo from Samuel Halperin to Francis Keppel, 17 May 1965, Folder LE/PQ 2-LE/WE 6 Legislation [2 of 3], Box 64, FG 266-1-1, Confidential File, White House Central File, LBJ Library.

would compete with the substantial program of aid…on which all college students in need could draw. The GI bill approach is not selective—not according to need, not according to ability, not according to motivation."[9]

Yarborough believed such concerns were beside the point. On the contrary, he contended, the legislation was an important first step in achieving the goals of the Great Society, and would "finance the final education of more persons than any other education proposal before Congress." He declared: "It is equitable. The benefits go to those who have served their country." Yarborough's claim drew on media images of patriotic young men who just needed a helping hand. "They are poor boys who cannot finance college or marriage," he said in a letter to President Johnson, "yet bright boys, under tightened service standards. In other words, they are the type of boys that you and I grew up with."[10] Yarborough's argument suggested that the legislation, by providing resources needed to pay for education or to begin families, would help veterans who were still boys make the transition to adulthood. At the same time, the Senator's efforts to draw attention to the ordinariness of veterans contrasted sharply with later claims that the damaging nature of service in Vietnam mandated the provision of benefits.

The White House's agenda of ensuring equality of opportunity for all citizens, rather than providing special assistance to veterans, did not meet with universal acclaim. The mother of a Marine serving with a helicopter squadron in Vietnam found it "difficult to understand the kind of thinking that, on the one hand, spends huge amounts of money on youth camps and other projects because of 'concern' for the young people of America; but, on the other hand,

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[9] Memo from Sam Hughes to Bill Moyers, 7 May 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[10] Letter from Ralph W. Yarborough to Lyndon B. Johnson, 6 May 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

opposes…assistance to those young people who are now fighting a very dirty war on the other side of the world."[11] Samuel F. Goddard, the Governor of Arizona, sent Johnson a telegram asking what would become of men who returned from Vietnam uninjured. They would be unable to take advantage of benefits for disabled veterans, but "they need education and training in order to become productive citizens."[12]

Others argued that benefits represented a crucial recognition of vets' claims as especially deserving citizens. A woman from Evanston, Illinois, whose son was in Vietnam, complained: "I feel that you have overlooked the most important American citizen—the American man fighting the war in Viet Nam…Put a GI Bill in that budget—show these young men that their country appreciates the outstanding job they are doing." Not only would a GI Bill be a "morale booster" for the troops, it would "show these so called 'protesters' in student groups that this country believes in young men who can fight for freedom, and they are going to be offered higher education in support of the tremendous job they are doing."[13] A VFW official from Texas opined that, in failing to support the legislation, the White House was stripping returning servicemen of their citizenship. He asked the president: "Why is your present policy making the veteran or his widow second-class American citizens? Your many 'Great Society' programs

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[11] Letter from Elizabeth D. Grisillo to the President, 22 July 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-10/14/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[12] Telegram from Samuel F. Goddard to the President, 21 July 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-10/14/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[13] Letter from Katharine B. Rosenau to the President, 24 January 1966, Folder LE/VA 10/15/65-3/2/66, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

have been 'pressured' through Congress while programs concerning the veteran and his widow have been fought foot and toe nail."[14]

The Johnson administration was deeply skeptical of legislation that suggested vets' claims to citizenship were more pressing or legitimate than those of other Americans. This position drew on arguments in a 1961 memo that argued veterans benefits were an "anachronism in a period of total national effort on both the military and welfare fronts." It was not clear "whether military service is an applicable and relevant criterion on which to base such benefits."[15] BOB director Charles L. Schultze noted that proponents of veterans benefits insisted that those serving in Vietnam were entitled to rewards equivalent to those granted veterans of World War II and Korea. Schultze again declared that the conflicts were not analogous and argued that the circumstances of military service had changed in ways that obviated the need for veterans benefits. "Unlike in WWII or Korea," he said, "compulsory military service is being administered to minimize disruption in education." Because the U.S. military was no longer composed chiefly of citizen soldiers, those who chose careers in the military were not entitled to compensation for that decision. Schultze explained: "We now have a professional Army. Pay and incentives in the military services ought to reflect the necessary 'rewards.' Hazardous duty should—and is being—specially compensated… Veterans benefits are not the means to provide

[14] Letter from F. M. Robinson to the President, 20 January 1967, Folder LE/VA 3/3/66-, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[15] Memorandum, 6 January 1961, "The Early Proposals" Folder, Box 1, New GI Bill 1966, Legislative Background and Domestic Crises File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The memo, it should be noted, was concerned primarily with "peacetime ex-servicemen." However, the Johnson administration initially resisted the classification of service in Vietnam as combat duty. For more on the debate over peacetime service, see Boulton, *A Price On Freedom*, 57-88.

the incentives or rewards which are appropriate in today's military context."[16] The shift to a professionalized military also meant that there was no threat of a sudden influx of returning veterans who would strain domestic resources. Sam Hughes observed: "The current domestic scene bears little resemblance to the post-war period when 15 million men were suddenly thrust back into the labor market."[17]

In light of the professionalization of the armed forces, benefits were not merely unnecessary; they actually threatened to weaken the military. VA head William Driver suggested that as a compromise, the administration might consider offering benefits only to those who had served in "hot spots" like Vietnam, rather than providing the full slate of benefits proposed by Yarborough. Most of the men then in Vietnam were not draftees, however, and the administration posited that service in combat zones was part of their job. Therefore, "while benefits for extra hazardous duty should be made part of the military reward system," the government was under no obligation to provide additional veterans benefits. Furthermore, civilian education benefits would serve as a disincentive for reenlistment, undermining the retention rates critical to the success of a professional military. Hughes argued benefits legislation "would conflict with the Defense Department's efforts to retain its trained career personnel. In fact, the military service offers its own education assistance program as an incentive to continued military service."[18]

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[16] Memo from Charles L. Schultze to Bill Moyers, 9 June 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library. Emphasis in the original.

[17] Memo from Philip S. Hughes to Lee C. White, 5 June 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[18] Memo from Philip S. Hughes to Lee C. White, 5 June 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

Perhaps the most important reason for Johnson's reluctance to support the GI Bill was the fear that such an endorsement would be equated with an admission that the United States was at war in Vietnam. In a June 1965 memo laying out the reasons for the administration's opposition to the legislation, Sam Hughes worried that the "foreign policy implications could be embarrassing." "Recognition of Viet Nam as a situation like the 'Korean conflict,' for which GI benefits applied," Hughes suspected, "is undoubtedly a far greater admission of our involvement than the President would want to make at this time."[19]

Though the Johnson administration hoped to downplay the extent of its involvement, by the summer of 1965 it was clear that the president had made an extensive military commitment to Vietnam. Almost a year earlier, in August 1964, Congress had passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which authorized Johnson to conduct the conflict as he saw fit. In the fall of that year, during his reelection campaign, Johnson evaded criticism on the issue of Vietnam by promising not to "send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."[20] Following Johnson's crushing defeat of Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater, however, the administration moved to escalate the war. In the winter of 1965, the president began operation Rolling Thunder, a campaign of continuous bombing in North Vietnam. Less than two weeks later, General William C. Westmoreland, the commander of American forces in Vietnam, asked for two battalions of Marines to protect an American airfield. The president assented. In March 1965, the first

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[19] Memo from Philip S. Hughes to Lee C. White, 5 June 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[20] Quoted in Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1991), 411. For an extensive analysis of the Johnson administration's deepening commitment to the war in Vietnam from 1964 to 1966, see pages 403-487.

American combat troops arrived in Vietnam in an elaborately staged event that featured Marines swarming ashore on the beach in Da Nang, where they were "greeted by grinning Vietnamese girls distributing garlands of flowers and a poster proclaiming: 'Welcome to the Gallant Marines.'"[21] In April, Johnson decided to go on the offensive in South Vietnam, a choice that entailed the deployment of more than 20,000 additional troops.

Despite appearances to the contrary, Johnson publicly maintained that there was no war in Southeast Asia. The administration adopted what an aide called a "policy of minimum candor," a strategy of revealing as little about American activities in Vietnam as was possible without lying outright. Even after ordering the deployment of thousands of combat troops, Johnson insisted that he was pursuing "no far-reaching strategy." He also cautioned his staff to avoid "premature publicity" of the new military commitment. These tactics may have delayed recognition of the war, but they were unable to entirely forestall it. A month before the first Marines arrived in Vietnam, *New York Times* columnist James Reston wrote: "The time has come to call a spade a bloody shovel. This country is in an undeclared and unexplained war in Vietnam. Our masters have a lot of fancy names for it, like escalation and retaliation, but it is a war just the same."[22]

Pressure on the White House to support veterans benefits escalated in proportion to American activities in Vietnam. VA head William Driver, one of the few supporters of the Cold War GI Bill in the administration, pointed out that it was no longer "realistic" for the White House to claim that the nation was not at war. There was therefore little reason to continue to oppose benefits. In early 1965, Driver warned: "To advise…that such legislation should not be

[21] Ibid., 430-32.

[22] Ibid., 429-30, 433.

enacted because readjustment assistance should be made available only to persons who have 'war service' can have little weight with anyone who reads the daily newspapers."[23] In May, a memo from Driver to the president noted growing public interest in the creation of a benefits package, and observed that the "increase in interest is attributable to a number of factors, including the escalation of combat activities in Vietnam, the landing of or troops in Santo Domingo, and the promulgation of Executive Order 11216 which declared Vietnam to be a combat zone since January 1, 1964, for the purposes of Internal Revenue laws."[24] An unidentified "observer of veterans legislation" quoted in the *New York Times* confirmed that the war was responsible for the bill. Even veterans organizations, the observer said, had only begun lobbying for the legislation once "sentiment over Vietnam [was] running high."[25] In 1965, the American Legion began to accept "veterans of the cold war" as members after delegates at the national convention concluded that at least some men who had served in the military since the Korean War could claim wartime service.[26]

In February 1966, the House of Representatives unanimously passed legislation promising a range of educational benefits for vets. The Senate accepted the bill, formally called

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[23] Letter from W. J. Driver to Kermit Gordon, 12 February 1965, Folder LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

[24] Memo from William Driver to Lyndon B. Johnson, 25 May 1965, Folder: Veterans Administration 1965-1966, Box 33, FG 266-1-, Confidential File, White House Central File, LBJ Library.

[25] Marjorie Hunter, "Veterans' Lobby Button-holes Discreetly," *New York Times*, 13 February 1966, 170.

[26] "Legion Will Admit Cold War Veterans," *New York Times*, 26 August 1965, 41.
Though delegates at the American Legion's annual convention concluded that, by 1965, some men had wartime service records, the Legion was interestingly split on the question of what Cold War service should count. Some argued that the nation had been embroiled in conflict since Pearl Harbor. Others posited that the 1958 authorization of an expeditionary medal for Vietnam service marked the beginning of the eligibility period for would-be members, and still other Legion members said that the conflict had not begun until the 1964 action in the Tonkin Gulf. However, all believed that men serving in Vietnam in 1965 were part of a wartime military.

the Veterans' Readjustment Benefits Act, with only minor amendments. Driver urged the president to sign: "While this bill is more extensive and more expensive than I might wish, I believe that it is a highly desirable measure and I recommend that it be approved by the President." Despite the administration's previous opposition, "after the escalation of combat in Vietnam, the situation changed" and benefits were "justified."[27] Under mounting pressure from Congress and his own VA head, Johnson signed the legislation.

A scant nine months later, Driver suggested that the administration could use the bill to promote the notion that Vietnam veterans were unusually productive members of society. Driver proposed that the VA issue a press release that stressed that "the maturity and social responsibility of our returning Viet-Nam veterans far outdistances their age in many cases. Our returning veterans recognize that they will have to take their place in a responsible society and are working hard and diligently to achieve this." That former servicemen were good citizens was "shown quite clearly by the thousands of veterans who are taking advantage of the educational benefits of the new GI Bill."[28]

The press evidently shared Driver's sanguine assessment of veterans' prospects. Most reports on the bill's passage, with headlines such as "New G.I. Bill Wins in House By 381-0; President Loses," focused on Lyndon Johnson's unusual defeat in a battle with Congress. As the popularity of the name "Cold War GI Bill" for the legislation suggested, most observers treated it

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[27] Letter from W. J. Driver to Charles E. Schultze, 11 February 1966, Folder: "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutions—II," Box 1, New GI Bill 1966, Legislative Background, LBJ Library.

[28] Memo from William J. Driver to the President, 2 December 1966, Folder LE/VA 3/5/66-9/7/67, Box 161, White House Central File LE, LBJ Library.

as little more than an extension of the benefits granted veterans of World War II and Korea.[29] Most journalists who considered the meaning of the legislation for veterans assumed that it would be as effective as the 1944 GI Bill. A brief article in *Time*, titled "Join the Army and Buy a Home," declared: "Military service—either in or far away from Viet Nam—may not be the easiest way to get ahead in the world. But it can help."[30]

Indeed, *Newsweek* suggested in 1967 that the conflict would have little lasting impact on the United States. Though questions surrounding the war had begun to create political rifts, "the war in Vietnam has failed to fire the American imagination." The "equivocal nature" of the war itself was largely responsible for this phenomenon. So too was Americans' evident lack of emotional investment in the conflict; "the TV glimpse of a young marine setting fire to a Viet Cong village with his Zippo [was] no match for the romantic grandeur of a triumphant Douglas MacArthur wading ashore in the Philippines." As a result, "Vietnam's contribution to the pop psyche has been uncommonly small: a few expressions ('hawk,' 'dove,' 'escalation,' 'credibility gap'), a few semi-ignored heroes…a single hit song ('Ballad of the Green Berets'). Even the GI's name for the enemy—'Charlie'—has none of the fervent zip of Kraut, Jap, or Gook."[31] *Newsweek*'s claims that the impact of the war would be minimal would soon be proven false.

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[29] See, for example: Marjorie Hunter, "New G.I. Bill Wins in House By 381-0; President Loses," *New York Times*, 8 February 1966, 1; "Committee Votes For a Permanent GI Bill of Rights," *Washington Post*, 4 February 1966, A7; Jonathan Spivak, "White House May Seek a Permanent GI Bill as a Result of the War," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 1966.

[30] "Join the Army and Buy a Home," *Time*, 18 February 1966, 23.

[31] "A Nation At Odds," *Newsweek*, 10 July 1967, 16-22.

John "Gunny" Musgrave enlisted in the Marines in 1966 because he sought "adventure and a shortcut to manhood." Moreover, he wanted to prove that he was the equal of World War II veterans, that he "loved [his] country as much as any old man that sets on his ass and swills beer in a VFW." Musgrave volunteered to serve in the infantry in Vietnam and quickly earned a reputation for his martial enthusiasm. Though he was uninterested in securing a democratic South Vietnamese state, Musgrave feared that Communists in Vietnam, if not stopped, would soon invade the U.S. He quickly bonded with the other men in his unit, who were "more important to [him] than every Vietnamese, regardless of age or sex or philosophical background."[32] Musgrave was wounded three times, the third near fatally, but tried to return to Vietnam, though his superior officers refused his requests. Instead, they discharged Musgrave and sent him home to Kansas, where the community "made a big fuss over him."[33] As a fully disabled veteran, Musgrave was eligible for VA benefits that included the entire cost of college, a living stipend, and a disability pension.

Yet Musgrave struggled with severe readjustment problems in the years after his return stateside. He suffered from nightmares and flashbacks and had trouble fitting in on his university's campus. VA doctors operated seventeen times, but were unable to relieve the constant pain his injuries caused. He relied heavily on painkillers supplied by the VA, which clouded his mind, and wrestled with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Musgrave began to question the necessity of American involvement in Vietnam and joined Vietnam Veterans

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[32] Nicosia, *Home To War,* 286. For a detailed account of Musgrave's Vietnam service and postwar experiences, see pages 285-299.

[33] Ibid., 290.

Against the War (VVAW). He later broke with the liberal organization because he felt his political conservatism and continued dedication to the Marine Corps made him a target of ridicule and suspicion. However, his antiwar views also alienated him from the residents of his hometown, many of whom had sons in Vietnam. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) hired Musgrave as an outreach counselor; he worked with vets in Lawrence, Kansas for three years. In the early 1980s, VA counselors helped Musgrave overcome many of his problems, but he retained a virulent animosity toward the federal government. Though it had paid for his college education and provided extensive medical treatment, Musgrave believed the "VA only compounded the problem of a warrior's pride, because they made it so hard for a vet with readjustment problems to get help." Musgrave thanked the Marines, not the VA, for the benefits he had received and concluded the VA was the "enemy of the veteran, not the friend."[34]

Musgrave's story intersects with the experiences of many American men who served in Vietnam. Like Musgrave, some chose to enlist in the military because they hoped that service would prove to be a "shortcut to manhood." In the war's early years, media coverage of American troops reinforced this hope, as the activities of servicemen in Southeast Asia were described in adulatory and heroic terms. When they returned home, many veterans chose to take advantage of educational benefits and other programs offered by the federal government. Yet Musgrave and other vets believed that the government for which they had fought had abandoned them. Exhaustive press coverage that detailed vets' readjustment problems and struggles to secure benefits reinforced their impressions.

Gunny Musgrave and other servicemen were not the only Americans in the 1960s who viewed military service as an opportunity to prove their manhood. Policymakers regularly

[34] Ibid., 298-99.

articulated notions of a positive military masculinity on a national stage. Many in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were also deeply concerned with projecting public images of forceful masculinity. This tendency, historian Robert Dean has argued, encouraged them to wage war in Vietnam, a conflict that they viewed as a test of American political and military "will."[35] Anti-Communist Cold Warriors like President John F. Kennedy were members of a "cult of masculine toughness."[36] America's failure to win the Korean War encouraged "doubts that American men were prepared to meet the demands of a hypermilitarized nation."[37] The rhetoric of masculinity deployed by policymakers and in the press in the early years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam countered such concerns. President Kennedy embraced the Green Berets as men who "encompassed savagery and civilization" and embodied the American myth of the "frontier hero." The interest he encouraged in the Special Forces helped to counter the impression of the military as an institution that discouraged individualism and acted, as *Newsweek* claimed, like a "mother hen."[38] President Johnson suggested American military power emasculated opponents abroad. In the wake of bombing in North Vietnam in 1965, Johnson exulted: "I didn't just screw Ho Chi Minh. I cut his pecker off."[39] Political leaders encouraged a "propaganda of male honor" to inspire individuals to sacrifice their lives for

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[35] Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*. See also Baritz, *Backfire*.

[36] Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture*, 237. Barabra Ehrenreich has similarly argued that "Communism kept masculine toughness in style." See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), 103.

[37] Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture*, 137.

[38] Hellmann, *American Myth*, 41-53.

[39] Quoted in Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 106.

causes, including the war in Vietnam.[40] The rhetoric of politicians and military leaders highlighted a militarized masculinity and encouraged individuals to prove their manhood by volunteering to fight in Vietnam.[41]

It was in this atmosphere of confidence in American military might and celebrations of manhood that many young men enlisted. Soldiers frequently emphasized personal or cultural factors in their decisions to join the military, though the economy and the threat of the draft played significant roles in pushing them into the armed forces. In working-class communities, economic and institutional factors circumscribed the choices available to young men. Indeed, the military was one of a limited range of employment options. Moreover, many believed the arrival of a draft notice was inevitable. Those who enlisted often did so in order to stay a step ahead of the draft; they wanted to choose the branch of the military in which they would serve and when.[42]

Cultural emphases on masculinity also influenced many of them. Most grew up in the 1950s, playing games and watching films that glorified the military and the Allied victory in World War II. One veteran recalled: "When I was a little kid the Old Man used to have on the television, you know—World War II shit….I watched John Wayne movies…You go for this shit and you start thinking, well, I want to be like my Old Man." Others similarly felt they had "something to prove." Frank Matthews wanted to show that, though he stood just under five and a half feet tall, he could hold his own in a fight. "When I joined and thought about going to war

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[40] Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism*, 521.

[41] Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man*, 154-155.

[42] Appy, *Working-Class War*, 44-50. My discussion of the reasons men joined the military is based on Appy's arguments in Chapter 2, "Life Before the Nam," in *Working-Class War*.

it was sort of like…always being like…well…with my size. I'm always seemingly smaller than anybody else, so I had to do a lot of extra fighting to catch up." Another man believed that avoiding the draft was cowardly: "I mean, even if *you* escaped it, they were just going to take your buddies. Suppose I had found a way out. How would I face my friends…seeing their parents, and knowing that they were over in Nam getting shot at while I'm home partying? I'd feel like a chickenshit."[43]

Basic training further convinced servicemen that the military provided a unique path to masculinity. In both the Army and the Marine Corps, boot camp was designed to undermine recruits' sense of self and attachments to civilian life. Drill instructors relied heavily on a rhetoric of gender and sexuality in order to accomplish this goal. They characterized civilian life as the refuge of the effeminate and called new soldiers "girls, "sissies," and "fags." One sergeant, after learning that a man in his charge had a college degree, responded, "How could anyone with balls spend FOUR YEARS in college?" The graduate was known thereafter as "College Fag." Basic training taught soldiers to define themselves in opposition to women and gay men, described, as Chris Appy has argued, as the "epitome of all that is cowardly, passive, untrustworthy, unclean, and undisciplined." Recruits were encouraged to embrace a "model of male sexuality…directly linked to violence," and to see "war as a substitute for sex or as another form of sex." Basic training aimed to persuade recruits that they could become men only through service in the armed forces.[44]

Media coverage reinforced this notion by focusing on the masculine qualities of Americans fighting in Southeast Asia and particularly on decorated servicemen, though *Time*

[43] Ibid., 72-75, 50.

[44] Ibid., 86-96, 100-102.

magazine declared that "with each war the Medal of Honor becomes harder to win."[45] After only six months in Southeast Asia, Captain Pete Dawkins had won three Vietnamese Crosses for Gallantry—that nation's second-highest military decoration—and two Bronze Stars with a V for Valor from the U.S. Army. The award, a 1966 *Life* cover story reported, was only the latest of the officer's triumphs; Dawkins had "pursued excellence most of his life." The author depicted Dawkins as an all-American boy. Though he contracted polio as a child, he made a full recovery and went on to West Point, where he became the "most honored cadet" in the academy's history and the All-America captain of the football team. After graduation, Dawkins studied at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and "taught his English friends some bruising things about their own game of rugby." Dawkins approached his duties in Vietnam with the vigor and enthusiasm that characterized his athletic endeavors. "This is the big stadium," he declared. "This is the varsity. I want to be on it."[46]

Dawkins's medals and his conduct as an adviser to the 1st Vietnamese Airborne Battalion seemed to confirm his status as the ideal American fighting man. He was courageous in battle and didn't "suffer so much as a hangnail." However, the captain had some difficulty adjusting to life in Vietnam. He observed: "The Vietnamese do odd things—they urinate on the sidewalks and spit chicken bones on the floor and the men hold hands as a sign of friendship." He found, however, that "as you wear through this surface glaze, they become human beings." Indeed, Dawkins forged bonds with his Vietnamese counterparts; photos that accompanied the profile showed him consulting earnestly with a Vietnamese officer and playing the guitar and a game of

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[45] "Band of Heroes," *Time*, 1 September 1967, 16.

[46] Sam Angeloff, "Pete Dawkins Takes the Field," *Life*, 8 April 1966, 91-100. Andrew Huebner, in his analysis of the same article, emphasizes how the use of sports metaphors in the piece highlighted its subject's masculinity. Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 183.

cards with enlisted men. The captain, a "direct young man who like[d] to lay his shoulders into a problem," also embodied the American approach to problem-solving. He noted ruefully, however, that this approach did not always appeal to those with whom he worked: "They're not devious people—they're Oriental….Part of their culture is that they attack a problem indirectly—they sneak up on an issue."[47]

Reporters' comparisons between U.S. troops and their South Vietnamese allies reinforced the Americans' manly heroism. Dawkins's comrades were "tough, leathery little men," but the American GI's physical presence was far more imposing than theirs; he towered over them.[48] A sergeant, assigned as an advisor to a South Vietnamese unit, had a similar reaction to his Vietnamese counterparts. He complained that after eating, "the Asian will simply lie down and even try for a snooze," while Americans "may lie down, but in a few minutes he will be indulging in a bit of horseplay." More worryingly, "when we get into a fight the Asians can be quite heroic but unlike Americans they are inclined to let the Vietcong break off. Americans would like to chase after the Vietcong." This gap in enthusiasm and "toughness," he thought, could be attributed to differing physiques. He opined that "by and large the old adage prevails—a good big man can outdo a good little man."[49] The sergeant was not the only one to link Vietnamese troops' stature to an alleged unwillingness to fight. An Army helicopter pilot recalled a combat landing during which South Vietnamese soldiers hesitated to jump from the

[47] Angeloff, "Pete Dawkins Takes the Field."

[48] Ibid.

[49] Jack Raymond, "When G.I. Joe Meets Ol' Charlie," *New York Times*, 25 July 1965, SM4.

chopper to the ground. The crew chief, a 250-pound man, "just pick[ed] them up by the scruff and drop[ed] them out the hatch."[50]

Pete Dawkins and his fellow soldiers demonstrated their prowess with Vietnamese women in ways that reinforced their manly image. A photo of the captain showed him speaking to a crowd of "Saigon schoolgirls" as they "squeal[ed] delightedly."[51] Other reports described similar interactions. A *Time* article on rest and relaxation (R&R) opportunities for American troops was accompanied by four pages of photos of soldiers socializing with sometimes scantily-clad local women. At Vung Tau, a beach resort an hour from Saigon, "The surf runs high, the bars stay open late, and a combat-fatigued Marine can always find a Vietnamese girl who owns a bikini." The writer observed: "In general, the modern U.S serviceman is better educated, more sophisticated, more curious about alien cultures, and better behaved than any of his predecessors."[52]

Servicemen were equally attractive to the powerful women who represented Vietnam's long tradition of women warriors and who had "amassed some of the largest fortunes in South

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[50] Hal Keating, "Chopper Pilots, Home from Vietnam, Recall Experiences," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1966, CS2.

[51] Angeloff, "Pete Dawkins Takes the Field."

[52] "Five-Day Bonanza," *Time*, 22 December 1967, 52-53, 57. The authors of a briefing at an R&R center in Taipei, however, questioned solders' judgment. They thought it necessary to warn: "Do not purchase the company of a girl for more than 24 hours at a time; they seldom look as good in the morning." By 1969, the military's struggle to manage the effects of soldiers' fraternization with local women, especially the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, prompted Brigadier General David Thomas, "the U.S. Army's top medic in the war zone," to propose "Army-run brothels." "Morals: A New Moratorium?" *Time*, 21 November 1969, 62. Not all soldiers appreciated this portrayal. A private wrote to *Time* on behalf of several men to complain: "We feel this article gave facts which would have been better left unsaid. Believe me, sir, not all of us go on R&R to indulge in the many sexual pleasures easily available here in the Far East. Our wives and parents will surely read your article, and they may get the wrong idea. We feel this article could endanger our R&R rights in the future." See (PFC) Byron Matson, "Jeez, Now You've Done It," *Time*, 12 January 1968, 6.

Vietnam." The Americans, for their part, were evidently willing to overlook the women's hard-won status. According to *Time*: "For all their new freedom, power and influence, the women of South Viet Nam have lost none of the charm that has captivated generations of Westerners. They can be so bewitching that some 500 G.I.s have braved the tangles of red tape that the Army purposely puts in their way and brought home South Vietnamese war brides."[53]

Indeed, the presence of women on the front lines in Vietnam provoked tongue-in-cheek commentary from Americans evidently steeped in the traditions of military masculinity. A writer for *Time* noted the "bravery" of Vietnamese women, including one who raced through crossfire to bring her husband needed ammunition, and a group of women in an outpost attacked by South Vietnamese Communists who "grabbed rifles and tommy guns and coolly held off the attackers until the men returned." Yet the same author spoke of a woman company commander as a "pistol-packing mama…who occasionally slips into the town of Tan An for a hairdo" and reminded readers that Vietnamese women were "well-shaped, lovable—and lethal."[54]

A 1966 recruiting campaign by the American Red Cross assumed that soldiers in Vietnam would be similarly alluring to American women. The Red Cross sought to attract women who would run "Clubmobiles" offering troops in the field recreational opportunities that included free coffee and doughnuts, bingo, and the latest records. When a traveling clubmobile arrived, soldiers were "given an hour off from fighting to take part in the fun and games." The Clubmobiles also offered information on Vietnamese history and customs. A key inducement offered to women volunteers was that Red Cross facilities were "out in the boondocks, where the boys are." According to a *Washington Post* interview with two volunteers, "the only sour note

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[53] "South Viet Nam: The Women," *Time,* 8 November 1968, 43-44.

[54] "Viet Nam: Girls Under Fire," *Time*, 23 July 1965, 23.

about going to Vietnam is the 7 p.m. curfew," which Clubmobile worker Ann Higgins noted was "hard on your bridge game…. I'll have to learn to knit all over again."[55]

The very nature of the war seemed to demand new manly modes of combat. Guerrilla warfare was "no place for the traditional American rifleman, who prides himself on long-range sharpshooting and an unerringly steady hand…most firefights occur at ranges of 50 feet or less, in dense jungle that offers only a fleeting glimpse of the enemy." In order to develop a response to these new circumstances, the Army adopted a "Quick Kill" method developed by Mike Jennings, a "dabbler in horse races, prize fights, and shooting matches." This approach required soldiers to summon the courage to run directly at enemy forces in order to shoot them at point-blank range.[56] In a bid to find "an elusive enemy," an Army reconnaissance platoon acquired motorcycles on which they pushed through the jungles. The men, who called themselves "Nam's Angels," lamented the impossibility of finding Harley-Davidsons in Vietnam. One declared that they needed "big drive sprockets, knobby wheels—and more vroom."[57]

The warm welcome vets received in the years before 1968 reflected a sense that their actions in Vietnam had been heroic. President Johnson invited two veterans, and their wives and children, to spend a day with him at his Texas ranch.[58] The proprietors of a resort near Phoenix, Arizona invited a group of randomly-selected Marines for a free weeklong vacation, during which they were entertained by a "group of pretty hostesses." "It's just our way of showing

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[55] Winzola McLendon, "It's Not Paradise, But the Men Are There," *Washington Post*, 13 January 1966, B1.

[56] "Quick Kill," *Time,* 14 July 1967, 16.

[57] "And now a Vroom," *Time*, 2 May 1969, 30-31.

[58] John D. Pomfrets, "Johnson Joined by 2 Vietnam Veterans in Making the Rounds at Ranch," *New York Times*, 15 November 1965, 1.

them that we're behind them," the hotel's owner explained.[59] On Veterans Day in 1965, students at California State College at Fullerton planned a day of festivities to honor those who served in Vietnam.[60] A few months later, students at the University of Florida "wined, dined and dated" four combat veterans, who were "feted for four days at a round of fraternity and sorority parties." The student body president explained that the students wanted "to show the soldiers overseas and the nation that draft card burners and bearded protestors represent at best a slim minority of college students."[61] The author of a 1967 letter to *Time* magazine believed that military service conferred masculine and heroic qualities. Peter K. Bros suggested the magazine select "the soldier on the line in Vietnam" for its annual "Man of the Year" award. "The boy of last year has become this year's Man of the Year," Bros wrote. "He is sloshing around in mud so that I'm free to write this letter."[62]

A 1969 study by the military found that heroism prevailed among American servicemen in Vietnam. Occasions on which wounded men carried injured comrades to safety or continued fighting, according to *Time* magazine, were not "incidents taken from the script of the next John Wayne movie or from the citations of Medal of Honor winners. They are simply the everyday stuff of battle in Viet Nam, where…unsung and unrecognized physical heroism is routine." For the study, interviewers from the Army and the Marines spoke to 7,600 wounded men, many of them injured only minutes before the interviews took place. In the process, they learned that the

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[59] Steve Bassett, "Resort Gives Viet Veterans a Free Week," *Washington Post*, 11 December 1965, A14.

[60] Milt Brouhard, "Veterans Day Events Back Vietnam Action," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 1965, OC1.

[61] "Florida U. Will Honor Vietnam War Veterans," *New York Times*, 10 February 1966, 2.

[62] Peter K. Bros, "Man of the Year," *Time*, 29 December 1967, 5.

adrenaline of combat was "an important stimulus to physical heroics." When wounded men regained consciousness, their "heroism [left] a hangover of dauntlessness." They often asked about the results of battles rather than focusing on their own injuries, and insisted that they were able to return to their units without medical treatment. Indeed, "almost all of the victims were able to toss off nonchalant quips about their plight." When asked what had happened to him, a hospitalized soldier responded: "Some bastard stepped on a mine." The man in the adjacent bed "brightly chimed in: 'Yeah, I'm the bastard.'" Interviewers for the study, the *Time* report said, were "amazed" at the discovery that "a bit of the hero lurks in every man." A Marine sergeant concluded: "We had seen this kind of behavior in the movies, and we were trained to do it. I had always thought it was the exception. It is, however, the rule."[63]

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Yet less than a year after the magazine published this glowing account of American conduct overseas, *Time* accused American soldiers of "humiliating" the United States. In a November 1969 address to the nation, President Richard Nixon declared: "North Viet Nam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that." The Americans Nixon had in mind were members of the antiwar movement, not those serving in Southeast Asia. In his speech, Nixon called upon the "great silent majority" of his fellow Americans, who he believed shared his dismay at the activities of the "vocal minority" of antiwar activists who dominated the headlines, to support his agenda in Vietnam and his efforts to quiet the antiwar movement. The President feared that the protesters would undermine his "goal of a just and

[63] "The Hero in Every Man," *Time*, 16 May 1969, 52.

lasting peace."[64] One month later, *Time* magazine suggested that events in Southeast Asia had fulfilled Nixon's prediction "[i]n a terrible way that he did not mean or likely imagine." American servicemen had "humiliated the U.S. and called in question the U.S. mission in Viet Nam in a way that all the antiwar protesters could never have done."[65] The *Time* article joined a growing number of accounts critical of American soldiers and veterans. Reports on low morale overseas and vets' readjustment problems were often premised, implicitly and explicitly, on assumptions about servicemen's masculinity. The disaffected or rebellious troops in Vietnam, observers implied, were not sufficiently displaying heroic, courageous, military masculinity. They were also failing to live up to the valorous precedent purportedly set by their fathers' generation during the Second World War. Unemployed veterans, meanwhile, were failing to meet their obligations as family breadwinners. While these narratives implied a lack of masculinity, another strain of commentary argued that combat encouraged an excess of manhood. Revelations that American soldiers were killing Vietnamese civilians suggested that hypermasculine aggression might be the cause of the atrocities.[66]

Time's declaration that American servicemen had humiliated the nation was a response to a story by Seymour Hersh, picked up by the Dispatch News Service. Published on November 13, 1969 by 35 newspapers across the country, it shocked the public with its tale of an atrocity

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[64] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," 3 November 1969, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1969, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 901-909.

[65] "My Lai: An American Tragedy," *Time*, 5 December 1969, 23-34.

[66] For further analysis of the role played by masculinity in perceptions of Vietnam vets, see Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 202, 205, 227, 248, 263-66. Huebner offers numerous instructive comparisons between Vietnam vets and those who fought in earlier wars. Although many in the press—and veterans themselves—often suggested that Vietnam-era concerns about manliness were unprecedented, they closely resembled misgivings voiced in the 1940s and '50s about troops returning from World War II and the Korean War.

committed by American troops. On March 16, 1968, the men of Company C, First Battalion, Twentieth Infantry, Americal Division had murdered hundreds of unarmed civilians in a village designated My Lai 4 on military maps. The company commander, Captain Ernest Medina, evidently condoned the massacre, and may have instructed that it be carried out. Official military reports on the events at My Lai called it a battle and those killed enemy combatants, an account that subsequently appeared in newspapers stateside. Yet Charlie Company took not a single round of hostile fire. The American soldiers' approach to killing the villagers was "wholesale and systematic." They entered homes and shot the families inside, set fire to thatched roofs and laid in wait for those fleeing the flames, tossed grenades into crowded bomb shelters, and "[o]ne group of at least 75 women, children, and old men were thrown into a large ditch and sprayed with automatic fire." Servicemen took care to execute those who attempted to flee the village and raped many of the women. Between bouts of violence, the unopposed American force paused for cigarette and lunch breaks.[67]

Observers struggled to understand the incident, which some viewed as a betrayal of American ideals or of the nation itself. *Time* speculated: "Countless U.S. citizens, whether foes or critics of the Administration's Viet Nam policy, were simply shocked and bewildered at the unfolding story, so alien did it seem to the America they thought they knew." In March 1968, Charlie Company had been in Vietnam for only one month. In that time, enemy booby traps and sniper fire had reduced their number from 190 men to 105. However, "the strangeness of Viet Nam to freshly arrived U.S. troops and the frustrations of guerrilla warfare" did not suffice to explain the "savagery" of My Lai. Each soldier who participated had acted "against all he has

[67] Appy, *Working-Class War*, 274. For more complete descriptions of the massacre, see pages 273-277. Also see Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 210-217; and Seymour M. Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 1970).

been taught." Indeed, the article suggested that the "individual soldier in the American Army who commits an atrocity should be judged more harshly than a storm trooper," because Nazi troops had served a state that condoned the killing of civilians. Senator William Fulbright feared that the massacre would "cause grave concern all over the world…as to what kind of country we are."[68]

Efforts to understand what had spurred Charlie Company to such violence often focused on Lieutenant William Calley, who became the public face of the massacre. Though eighteen officers initially faced criminal charges for their roles in the killing and the subsequent cover-up, only Calley was convicted. Calley's background was entirely unremarkable, a circumstance which seemed to perplex commentators. According to a *Time* profile, Calley had all of the credentials of an "average American boy." The son of a Navy veteran, Calley grew up in a comfortably middle-class home in Miami. In high school, "Rusty" Calley "dated regularly, dressed well, drank beer with his buddies and kept things moving in any group." After the My Lai story broke, childhood friends and neighbors remembered Calley as a "moral character," a "good kid," and a "wonderful boy…[who] would do anything for you." The dean of boys at his high school described Calley as "just an average American boy." Calley's stint in the military was, with the obvious exception of My Lai, unremarkable. "There was nothing strange about him," a member of his platoon claimed. "He wasn't the best officer in the world. He wasn't the worst, either." Another man who served with Calley thought "he was sort of an all-American boy, a real nice guy."[69]

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[68] "My Lai: An American Tragedy."

[69] "An Average American Boy?" *Time*, 5 December 1969, 25.

The parents of some of the men at My Lai suggested the military was responsible for their sons' actions. Tony Meadlo, father of soldier Paul Meadlo, suggested that Calley was to blame. "If it had been me out there, I would have swung my rifle around and shot Calley instead—right between the goddamn eyes," he said. "Then there would have been only one death." Meadlo's mother, Myrtle, asked: "Why did they have to take my son and do that to him? I raised him as a good boy, and they made a murderer out of him." Myrtle Meadlo's sense that her son's military training was to blame was echoed in *Time*'s assessment of the massacre, which suggested that "contributing causes" included the common use of racial epithets by American troops to describe the enemy. This habit "shift[ed] the object into a thing rather than a person—and hence something that is easier to kill." The "frustration of guerrilla warfare in a hostile countryside" was also to blame.[70]

Other reports stressed that the violence was a product of the very nature of the conflict, not the responsibility of the men of Charlie Company. The massacre seemed so out of character for American fighting men that, "while many people might have been ready to accept sinister charges against eight Green Berets trained in 'black warfare,' they found it hard to believe that a young lieutenant and a platoon composed mainly of draftees could commit such a crime." *Newsweek* suggested that the victims of the massacre invited the violence. My Lai was located in "probably the most violence-ridden area in all of South Vietnam. Dirt-poor and hot-blooded, its people are known for their warlike ways, and when they are not battling outsiders, they are often fighting among themselves." The "chilling spectacle of cold-blooded murder may be interpreted by some as a sinister comment on the mid-century American psyche," but that was not its lesson. Ultimately, My Lai served as a "stark reminder of the brutalizing effect that

[70] "My Lai: An American Tragedy."

war—and particularly the war in Vietnam—has had upon too many of those unfortunate enough to become involved in it."[71]

Moreover, guerrilla war, which impaired the ability of American soldiers to distinguish civilians from combatants, led to deplorable behavior for which servicemen could not be held accountable. My Lai showcased a "distressing fact about the Vietnam war: many U.S. fighting men, under the stress of combat, display a profound contempt for the people of South Vietnam. With hearty distaste, GIs commonly refer to the South Vietnamese—allies and enemies alike—as 'dinks.'" This "dink syndrome" was likely responsible for the "casual killing of civilian bystanders." Indeed, *Newsweek* contended, sometimes such actions were nothing more than "mindless impulses." One GI, for example, "took a playful pot shot" at a farmer's hat but missed, hitting the man in the head and killing him. The writer implied that aiming for the farmer's hat was acceptable; the soldier's sin was that he missed. However, others who suffered from the "dink syndrome" acted "in a more premeditated way," including one man who hovered above free-fire zones in a helicopter, shooting at any Vietnamese people he saw without attempting to distinguish between allies and enemies.[72]

Indeed, many Americans were reluctant to hold servicemen responsible for their actions. When William Calley was brought to trial for the massacre at My Lai, he was greeted by an outpouring of support from a public that saw him as a victim of his military training and of the war. Eighty percent of Americans thought Calley should not have been convicted. He became "something of a folk hero," a popular song was written about him and Georgia governor Jimmy

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[71] "Song My: A U.S. Atrocity?" *Newsweek*, 1 December 1969, 35-37. "Song My" was one of several names by which the area in which the massacre took place was known. For purposes of clarity, I use the most common name, My Lai.

[72] "GIs in Battle: The 'Dink' Complex," *Newsweek*, 1 December 1969, 37.

Carter invoked Calley's patriotism in his declaration of an "American Fighting Men's Day." A woman from Ohio said, "I don't blame the soldiers. They've been brainwashed or they wouldn't be able to shoot anybody over there." A Floridian declared that she felt "as sorry for our men" as for the murdered Vietnamese civilians.[73]

Perceptions of U.S. troops as victims of the war, and of their military training in particular, undermined the idea, often expressed in the press in the early years of the war, that servicemen were especially courageous and masculine. Joseph Goldstein, a professor at Yale Law School, argued that all violations of the laws of war in Vietnam should be investigated, prosecuted, and recorded "so that they may relieve of liability and taint those who are unjustly tarnished with guilt by association through their service, however honorable it may have been, in Vietnam."[74] The claims made by Calley's supporters that military training damaged soldiers contradicted boot camp rhetoric insisting recruits became men by embracing violence. One man lampooned media narratives that praised the heroism of American troops and the rhetoric of politicians who said that those who opposed the war were suffering from a failure of nerve. In a mocking letter to the editor, he wrote: "Only effete snobs and impudent fools (or is it the other way around?) will blame clean-living American dropouts for the shooting of four-year-old children in My Lai." Recalling Nixon's campaign promises to bring the conflict rapidly to a

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[73] Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 214-217. Huebner argues that the common belief that Calley had been victimized by the military, which had "trained [him] to kill and then prosecuted him for doing a good job of it," indicated a "deep distrust" of the military. Some scholarship on the war has reproduced these assumptions about the transformative nature of military service in general, or combat in Vietnam in particular. See, for example, Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America.* Yet these interpretations flatten the diversity of experiences of the men who joined the armed forces, implicitly assume similarity in the backgrounds and motivations of men who enlisted, and suggest a peculiar sameness in the responses of a varied group of men to the stresses of military training and combat. For a discussion of the differing backgrounds and motivations of enlisted men, see Appy, *Working-Class War*, especially pp. 80-85.

[74] Joseph Goldstein, "The Meaning of Calley," *The New Republic*, 8 May 1971, 13-14.

close, he explained that the children killed in the massacre "would have been full-grown and battle-hardened Viet Cong by the time Nixon's secret plan to end the Viet Nam war can be expected to succeed."[75]

Suggestions that an embrace of terror and violence had begun to characterize the actions of at least some U.S. troops in Vietnam tempered the expressions of support. A California woman noted that events like My Lai undercut claims about the masculine heroism of American servicemen. "Perhaps the horror-filled memory of My Lai will awaken more of us to the belated knowledge that no nation has a monopoly on goodness, truth, honor and mercy," she suggested. However, these were the "virtues habitually ascribed to Americans, and particularly the American soldier."[76] Others declared that those fighting in Vietnam were no better than animals. A man from San Francisco believed that the "extermination of the civilian population at My Lai is yet another clear example that man, and not the lion, is the king of the beasts."[77] Similarly, a woman speculated that "the Vietnamese might prefer the lions to the Christians."[78]

Some observers warned that the atrocity cast a shadow over the nation's future. A Brazilian man argued that the revelations undercut Americans' exceptionalist claims, and warned that the nation should be prepared for still more violence. He equated the massacre with other atrocities that had taken place around the globe. He then wrote: "We are only human beings, and only the fittest will survive. Please stop playing with ideals and words, and be prepared, for

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[75] Letter to the editor from J. Edward Priggen, *Time*, 19 December 1969, 3.

[76] Letter to the editor from Bernice Balfour, *Time*, 19 December 1969, 3.

[77] Letter to the editor from Harvey E. Goldfine, *Time*, 19 December 1969, 3.

[78] Letter to the editor from Marnie Mellblom, *Time*, 19 December 1969, 3.

'something rather dark and bloody' may happen someday in the States."[79] A *Time* reader from New Jersey feared what would happen when soldiers returned stateside. She believed that the massacre was a logical corollary of military training, and that it was illogical to "hand these men guns, teach them to kill, and then expect them to remain mentally intact." Moreover, she continued: "If you think the younger generation is screwed up now, wait until you start checking out what's coming home from Vietnam."[80]

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My Lai opened the door to increased scrutiny of other problems faced by the military. The positioning of the men who killed women and children at My Lai as victims called into question assumptions that the American ranks in Vietnam were filled with brave young men of whom most Americans could be proud. Observers argued that military service was damaging American soldiers, who were responding with insubordination, desertion, and drug use. By the early 1970s, reports on the low morale of troops in Southeast Asia were commonplace. Commentators pointed to negative stories about servicemen as they wondered whether the patterns observed in Vietnam would continue when the troops came home. Some suggested that an expansion of federal assistance to veterans would be necessary to smooth the process of readjustment to civilian life.

In 1971, *Newsweek* devoted a cover story to the "troubled army" that focused on the problem of insubordination; it suggested that these problems arose from a lack of proper

[79] Letter to the editor from Jean Crété, *Time*, 19 December 1969, 3.

[80] Letter to the editor from Ellin Pollachek, *Time*, 19 December 1969, 3.

masculine courage and dedication to duty.[81] General Alexander Haig, national security advisor Henry Kissinger's deputy, had traveled to Vietnam to assess morale problems in the ranks. He concluded that although "the GI still gives a good account of himself when the chips are down, it is nonetheless clear that the American soldier belongs to one of the most deeply troubled armies in military history."

The story paid close attention to the troops' penchant for avoiding engagements with the enemy if they deemed such contact unnecessarily dangerous, a tendency some saw as cowardly or unmanly. A lieutenant explained: "Whenever we can get away with it, we radio the old man that we are moving our platoon forward…But if there is any risk of getting shot at, we just stay where we are until the chopper comes to pick us up." Though the article noted that soldiers in armies in retreat often value survival over the achievement of military objectives, its author denounced servicemen's efforts to avoid the enemy as "flakiness." A "lifer" interviewed for the story thought the problems resulted from a lack of masculinity on the part of the new recruits. "These young GIs make me sick," he said. "They're soft. They have no guts. They're afraid of being shot at. They've been spoiled because their parents made it too easy for them." The article concluded: "The central question…is whether an army that has begun to wilt can manage to wilt just a little."[82]

The masculinity of American soldiers also suffered in comparison to South Vietnamese men who were becoming ever more impatient with the American military presence. *Time* explained that U.S. troops indulged in conspicuous consumption and casual racism that invited

[81] For an extended discussion of press coverage of American troops in Southeast Asia, as well as a discussion of how that coverage reflected changing attitudes toward masculinity and the idea of American servicemen as victims, see Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 207-271.

[82] "The Troubled U.S. Army in Vietnam," *Newsweek*, 11 January 1971, 29-37.

anti-American sentiment. Consequently, Vietnamese women avoided American men: "The taunts of Saigon's 'cowboys,' the Honda-riding young toughs who infest the capital, have become so nasty that few respectable women like to be seen walking with foreigners…'O.K., ten dollars' or 'O.K., Salem,' are favorite slurs, implying that the woman has sold herself for money or cigarettes." In addition, some Vietnamese men accused Americans of carrying the "'shrinking bird' disease, which is said to cause the slow shriveling of the male genitals."[83]

Accounts of drug use in Vietnam positioned servicemen as both victims and threats to civilian society. Precise figures for the number of soldiers in Vietnam using or addicted to drugs were unavailable. A Defense Department spokesman estimated that, in 1971, the figure was between 50 and 60 percent of military personnel, up from 30 percent two years before. His approximation encompassed users of all narcotics, including marijuana, LSD, cocaine, heroin, and opium.[84] According to *U.S. News and World Report*, however, only ten percent of soldiers had a "major dependency" on drugs.[85] This figure was supported by the findings of two members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who estimated that ten to fifteen percent of military personnel in Vietnam in May 1971 were addicted to heroin.[86] A 1973 study funded by the Pentagon found that two years after their return stateside 1.3 percent of veterans were addicted to heroin.[87] Many observers found the widespread use of drugs especially alarming due to the perceived likelihood of former soldiers remaining addicted once they came home.

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[83] "South Viet Nam: Rising Resentment of the U.S.," *Time*, 24 October 1969, 28-29.

[84] "The Troubled U.S. Army in Vietnam," 34.

[85] "Growing Worry Over Drug-Hooked GI's," *U.S. News and World Report*, 12 April 1971, 30.

[86] William K. Wyant, Jr., "Coming Home With a Habit," *The Nation*, 5 July 1971, 7-10.

[87] "Heroin: A 'Plaything'?" *Time*, 7 May 1973.

William K. Wyant, the Washington correspondent for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, warned: "The men are coming home from Vietnam now by the tens of thousands. Some are in deplorable shape from exposure to an environment in which heroin is as easy to get as aspirin or chewing gum."[88] Concerns about addicted veterans led to calls for expanded VA drug treatment programs. Wyant observed that members of Congress were advocating such assistance because "drug addicts in uniform, many of them trained to use weapons, must not be turned loose on civilian society."[89] This viewpoint framed programs for vets as a way of repairing the damage done to them by the military service.

Such reports prompted observers to speculate about the demands that violent and damaged servicemen would make upon their return stateside. A 1970 *Wall Street Journal* article acknowledged that veterans of other wars had suffered readjustment problems, but asserted that, because of controversy over the war, the difficulties of the nation's newest veterans were especially acute. A social worker affiliated with the Veterans Administration theorized that "[m]en always come back from war with the need to feel that their sacrifices were worthwhile and appreciated, but the unpopular nature of this war makes this sort of thing tough to come by for the boy coming back from Vietnam."[90] James Reston, writing in the *New York Times*, asked not only what awaited returning vets, but also what "habits" they might have acquired in Vietnam. He continued: "We do not know what they are bringing back with them, but we know they are no longer 'boys.'" Following their experience is combat, they had grown into men, albeit "men trained in violence and guerilla warfare, many of them no doubt resentful of their

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[88] Wyant, "Coming Home With a Habit."

[89] Ibid., 8. See also "Growing Worry Over Drug-Hooked GI's."

[90] Neil L. Clemons, "Johnny Marches Home, 1970 Style" *Wall Street Journal,* 24 February 1970, 22.

contemporaries who stayed at home, many more brutalized by battle or corrupted by strong cheap dope, all of them expecting, and rightfully too, useful work and a decent life." Reston argued that veterans assistance programs would be essential to their transition to civilian life.[91]

Some vets encouraged the notion that they would bring their combat training to bear if subjected to prejudice on their return. One man declared: "Someday this war is going to be over, and half a million angry young men are going to descend on the 50 states with dreams of homes and families and education and jobs." He threatened violence if antiwar protestors on college campuses caused trouble for vets. "I sincerely hope that someone tries to stop a Marine 'leg' from going to class, or that some sorry, smelly social reject tries to plant a Viet Cong cross next to the artificial leg of a Seabee, or spits in the burned face of an Army medic," he warned. "I guarantee that it will only happen once."[92]

The questions of what had happened to American men in Vietnam, what would happen as they returned home, and what could be done to prevent readjustment problems gained considerable traction in the early 1970s. In 1971, consumer advocate Ralph Nader commissioned a study on federal benefits for Vietnam vets. The results, published in a volume titled *The Discarded Army*, suggested that federal benefits spending was wholly inadequate to meet the needs of a new kind of veteran.[93] Psychologist John Helmer produced a study of returning servicemen that assessed their potential for alienation and radicalization. He concluded it was unlikely that vets had the desire and ability to organize a successful rebellion. However, the questions with which he started his research indicate the depth of concern about the impact of

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[91] James Reston, "A Land Fit for Heroes?" *New York Times*, 7 March 1971, E13.

[92] T. Conner, "Letters," *Time*, 6 June 1969, 16.

[93] Paul Starr, *The Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973).

veterans on American society.[94] In 1974, Senator Vance Hartke, Chairman of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, oversaw the compilation of a volume that aimed to "present a representative spectrum of views concerning these veterans which have appeared in print since the Vietnam Conflict began." The resulting collection ran to many hundreds of pages of material and contained not a single article that presented an entirely positive view of Vietnam veterans.[95]

As concerns about veterans grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s, so too did calls for additional aid. Increasingly negative coverage of the war and questions regarding its purpose spilled into coverage of those who fought in it. In a reversal of earlier reports that had used the counterinsurgency tactics of the U.S. military to highlight the masculinity of American soldiers, some observers began to wonder if guerrilla warfare was creating a cadre of excessively aggressive men who would not balk at killing women and children. This fear was dramatically underscored by the 1969 revelation of American atrocities at My Lai. The press did little to draw the public's attention to the policy debates that surrounded the passage of the 1966 GI Bill. By the early 1970s, however, sustained media attention to the "troubled" American military in Vietnam suggested that a dramatic expansion of federal benefits programs was essential to forestall the replication of those problems as troops returned stateside.

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[94] John Helmer, *Bringing the War Home: The American Soldier in Vietnam and After* (New York: The free Press, 1974).

[95] *Source Material on the Vietnam Veteran* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), Preface.

Chapter 2: "Ghetto Guerillas"

On October 15, 1972, Illinois law enforcement officials announced that eight men from Chicago's South Side had been charged with involvement in nine murders, including those of two white suburban families. The suspects were reputed members of a group called De Mau Mau, characterized in the press as an "organization of black men who hated white people," formed by American troops serving in Vietnam.[1] Local police dismissed the possibility of robbery as a reason for the crimes; the accused men, they said, "were motivated to commit various brutal crimes. The primary motive appeared to be racial." The specter of a "black terror army" subsequently swept national headlines.[2] One police informant, a former De Mau Mau member, estimated that 3,000 to 4,000 men around the country belonged to the group and claimed, "you have to kill a whitey…to get into the gang."[3] Press accounts of the arrests focused on reports that the suspects were dishonorably discharged, "gun-happy…black Vietnam veterans bent on random slaughter of whites," men "embittered, armed and trained in combat," and individuals angered by unemployment and by the racism they had encountered both in the service and in civilian life.[4]

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[1] "'Pure Terror':Hurst; 'Mau Mau' Gang Blamed," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 October 1972, 1.

[2] "De Mau Mau," *Newsweek*, 30 October 1972, 48.

[3] "Report mass-killer gang plotted to slay cops here," *Chicago Daily News*, 16 October 1972, 1,8.

[4] "De Mau Mau."

Such claims derived much of their credibility from their conflation of stereotypes of hypermasculine, aggressive Vietnam veterans with fears prompted by racial tensions and the increasingly violent rhetoric of black radical movements. As one reporter asserted, Chicago was "a city where brutality and despair [had] become a way of life for many of the young on the South and West sides, and a record of racial hostility…coupled with the frustration of returning black veterans lent credulity to the charges."[5] The De Mau Mau story garnered attention around the country because it seemed to confirm fears that African-American veterans were especially prone to violence.

In 1965, seven years before the De Mau Mau incident, American policymakers had hoped that military service would have a positive impact on young African-American men, instilling attributes they defined as both masculine and desirable. A stint in the armed forces, policymakers reasoned, would foster honor, courage, responsibility, and the ability to support a family. In a report on the lack of social and economic opportunities in African-American communities, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan suggested that inequality had produced an unstable model of black family life, which was, in turn, reinforcing an unequal socioeconomic system. Moynihan's remedy was military service for young black men; it would, he argued, inculcate masculinity and thus encourage a commitment to family life, which would eventually lead to full citizenship for all African Americans. Acting on Moynihan's suggestion, in 1966 the Department of Defense began a program called Project 100,000 that inducted large numbers of young black men.

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[5] John Kifner, "De Mau Mau: Looking for Someone to Kill?" *New York Times*, 22 October 1972, E2.

However, heightened racial tensions in the late 1960s, coupled with media reports about the violent tendencies of Vietnam veterans, led to fears that African-American veterans exhibited an undesirable and aggressive masculinity that would destabilize, rather than strengthen, their communities. As a result of these concerns, the Pentagon created job training and other assistance programs for black vets; they aimed to reshape the image of vets by addressing the economic problems with which many veterans wrestled. Both African-American leaders and policymakers concluded that the most effective way of dealing with the threat of disaffected and violent black veterans was to provide them with economic security and assurances that their military service was valued and respected. In 1967, the Department of Defense established Project Transition, a readjustment and job training program designed primarily for returning African-American servicemen. Such initiatives were generally effective in securing employment for vets, though few took advantage of the opportunities offered.

Though the initiative had the potential to offer tangible assistance to vets, its primary purpose was symbolic. Federal officials, who had initially sought to encourage African-American men to display a type of martial masculinity, quickly backtracked and attempted to downplay the perceived effects of a stint in the armed forces. Programs for black vets represented a deliberate effort to control the attitudes and behavior of returning servicemen. Policymakers hoped the benefits would encourage black veterans to think of themselves as Americans able to claim the benefits of full citizenship. However, some black servicemen viewed the program as a superficial attempt to placate supposedly dangerous vets and dismissed its potential to offer economic benefits. They had hoped, through their military service, to secure benefits that went beyond access to specific federal grants and job training opportunities. They

wanted respect and equality of opportunity for themselves and their families; only then, they believed, would they have full citizenship.

Project Transition foreshadowed the veterans initiatives proposed in the 1970s and '80s. In establishing the initiative, which was explicitly framed as a component of the War on Poverty, the Johnson administration reversed its decision to avoid creating programs that might interfere with the Great Society. Project Transition was the first federal response to media coverage that described Vietnam veterans as potential threats to civilian society. It was no coincidence that the first program of this kind was aimed at returning African-American servicemen. Observers conflated assumptions about veterans with racial stereotypes and speculated that the threat posed by black vets was especially acute. The creators of Project Transition were at least as concerned with containing the perceived threat to civilian society as they were with compensating African-American men for their military service.

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In a commencement address at Howard University in June 1965, President Lyndon Johnson declared that federal efforts to address issues of civil rights required more than guarantees of equal protection under the law. "Freedom," he announced, "is not enough."[6] Johnson, whose speech focused on northern urban communities rather than on Jim Crow

[6] Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), 126. For a general description of the speech and its significance, see Rainwater and Yancey, pp. 1-5; the full text is reproduced pp. 125-132. The speech, which was written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Richard N. Goodwin, in consultation with African-American leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young, was based on the findings and recommendations of the then-secret Moynihan Report.

practices in the South, explained, "Negroes are trapped in inherited, gateless poverty."[7] He noted growing income disparities between blacks and whites and argued this inequality was the product of a breakdown in African-American families, which was, in turn, the result of a history of discrimination and oppression. Such circumstances, the President warned, were "often the source of destructive rebellion against the fabric of society."[8] Johnson announced that he would hold a White House conference, "To Fulfill These Rights," which would aim to "shatter forever not only the barriers of law and public practice but the walls which bound the condition of man by the color of his skin."[9] Equality of social and economic opportunity would be one of the primary goals of his administration. The President concluded with a reminder: "From the first, this has been a land of towering expectations…[that] all would be touched equally in obligation and in liberty."[10]

Military service was one of the routes of fulfilling the obligations of citizenship to which Johnson referred; many policy makers believed that the military was a promising venue for the promotion of racial justice. A series of reports prepared by the federal government suggested that the military could be used as a model of racial equality and argued the experience of military service would instill a sense of honor, responsibility, and patriotism in African-American youth.

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[7] Ibid., 128.

[8] Ibid., 129.

[9] Ibid., 131. For more on the White House conference and the controversy that surrounded it, see pp. 246-291.

[10] Ibid.

The Department of Defense accordingly endeavored to draw young black men into the military in an initiative characterized as the department's contribution to the Great Society.[11]

Key figures in the Johnson administration, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, had been involved for some years in efforts to ensure equality in the military in practice as well as in law. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy established the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces. The group, popularly known as the Gesell Committee, sought to ascertain whether African-American servicemen were still subject to discrimination on base or in neighboring communities and to formulate policies to eliminate inequitable treatment. After a year of investigation, the committee determined that prejudices still existed at home and abroad, both on- and off-base, and that they had a deleterious effect on the efficiency and morale of black troops. McNamara responded with a directive that affirmed the Pentagon's commitment to "fostering equal opportunity for servicemen and their families," made individual commanders responsible for "oppos[ing] discriminatory practices" on-base and

[11] James E. Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 35. The notion that the military might serve as a model of racial equality did not, of course, originate with the Johnson administration. In 1948, President Harry S Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces in Executive Order 9981, and thus created an institution that "seemed a model of racial amity for the rest of American life." On military bases, the Department of Defense operated what were, in effect, racially integrated communities, complete with stores and schools. See Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 268-269. Nalty argues: "By carrying out the policy announced by President Truman, the Department of Defense could for the moment claim the lead in bringing racial integration to the United States. Leadership, however, was passing to the federal courts, the Department of Justice, and ultimately the citizens of both races and various religions joining together to cause change." Under Johnson, however, the Department of Defense again attempted to take the lead in the promotion of racial equality, though their approach was based on efforts to ensure social and economic equality rather than forcing change through executive or legislative fiat.

in neighboring communities, and authorized the creation of a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civil Rights.[12]

Many of those involved with the Gesell Committee envisioned the report as a blueprint for shaping a military that would once again be seen as a leader in the field of civil rights. In a memo to Kennedy, McNamara affirmed that the Department of Defense would "take a leadership role in combating discrimination."[13] Committee member Whitney Young, Jr., the Executive Director of the civil rights organization the Urban League, saw the group's work as a "magnificent opportunity to perfect the program of integration in the armed services" and hoped that it would "serve as a model for many institutions in our own country and as an example when viewed abroad of what is possible under a democratic system."[14] Young's suggestion that that the implementation of the committee's recommendations would improve the military's international stature was echoed by Secretary of the Navy Fred Korth, who noted that the Navy presented a "daily, continuing demonstration to the people of the free world of democracy in action."[15]

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[12] "Department of Defense Directive 5120.36," 26 July 1963, "President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces" Folder, Box 1, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[13] Memo from Robert S. McNamara to the President, 24 July 1963, "President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces" Folder, Box 1, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[14] Letter from Whitney Young, Jr. to Gergard A. Gesell, 27 August 1962, "President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces" Folder, Box 1, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[15] Letter from the Secretary of the Navy to All Flag and General Officers, Unit Commanders, Commanding Officers and Officers in Charge, 26 March 1963, "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

Some members of Congress and the public, however, objected to this use of the military as a model for social change. In September 1963, Representative Carl Vinson, a Democrat from Georgia, introduced a bill that sought to bar the proposed changes, arguing that "social reform…should be a domestic matter for determination by Congress and the states, and not be converted into a military objective to be attained by the armed forces."[16] Robert Braun of Whittier, California wrote McNamara to express his dismay at the committee's suggestions, which he found "shocking, disgusting, and not in keeping with the American way of life."[17] Others concurred that the Department of Defense's proposals would restrict the freedom of American citizens and accused McNamara and Kennedy of employing "Gestapo tactics."[18] One opponent of reform produced a pamphlet, "Commissars in the U.S.A.," which argued that the Kennedy administration was seeking to "use the military bases to force radical social change," an aim that the author decried as "so outrageous—so much in violation of law and custom in this country—that one can hardly believe that they are serious." The tract was particularly concerned

[16] Carl Vinson, Letter to the Editor, *Armed Forces*, 25 September 1963. However, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, who was charged with the enforcement of the committee's recommendations, noted that the proposed legislation did not pose a major threat to the Defense Department's agenda, since hearings on the bill were unlikely. See "Gesell Report Recommendation," 9 December 1963, "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[17] Letter from Robert Braun to Robert S. McNamara, [undated, received by the Department of Defense on 23 October 1963], "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[18] Letter from Dale Joice to Rep. Lindley Beckworth, [undated], "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

by plans to appoint officers who would be held responsible for ensuring equal treatment on- and off-base, which it compared to "the kind of set up one finds in the Red Army."[19]

Moreover, despite McNamara's endorsement of the committee's recommendations, official agreement did not always translate into action. The various service branches were largely cooperative in agreeing to implement the directives, but military departments also failed to meet deadlines for the submission of anti-discrimination regulations and "guidance manuals" for base commanders.[20] One investigator found "complete official acceptance of racial integration at all levels, with no indication of any thought of reverting to the former segregated system." However, he noted a "lack of sensitivity on the part of some commanders…With efforts to root out the cancer of segregation causing upheavals here at home, I was distressed to find manifestations of the disease among our troops overseas, with little effort being made to eradicate it."[21]

These obstacles to equality notwithstanding, official attention soon turned to efforts to recruit more African-American servicemen. Just a few months after the completion of the Gesell Report, in September 1963, President Kennedy created the Task Force on Manpower

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[19] Thurman Sensing, Southern States Industrial Council, "Commissars in the U.S.A.," 17 August 1963, "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[20] For professions of cooperation, see: Memo from Alfred B. Fitt to Robert S. McNamara, 19 July 1963; Memo from Cyrus R. Vance to the Secretary of Defense, 12 July 1963; Memo from Eugene M. Zuckert to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower), 10 July 1963, "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library. For the failure to meet deadlines, see "Gesell Report Recommendation," 9 December 1963, "Gesell Committee Report and Backup" Folder, Box 2, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

[21] Memo from Lee Nichols to the Secretary of Defense, 13 May 1963, "President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces" Folder, Box 1, President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1961-1965, RG 220, LBJ Library.

Conservation; its mission was to explain reports that half of the young men who reported for preinduction draft examinations during 1962 were found unfit for military service on medical grounds or were labeled "mental rejectees" because they had failed the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT).[22] Kennedy argued that the statistics were "an indictment and an ominous warning," noting that the rejectees represented "a large proportion of the present alarming total of unemployed youth. Today's military rejects include tomorrow's hard-core unemployed."[23]

The resulting 1964 report, *One-Third of a Nation*, painted a picture of young men of color, opportunities circumscribed by urban poverty and inadequate schooling, who were eager to better their circumstances through further education and training. Of those who had failed the AFQT, over half were classified as "nonwhite."[24] Three out of four grew up in urban areas, almost half came from families with six or more children, one fifth came from families who had recently received public assistance, and forty percent had dropped out of school in order to support themselves or their families.[25] Moreover, thirty percent were unemployed, and whites earned a third more than their nonwhite counterparts.[26] However, four of five wanted more education, and ninety percent of nonwhite men wanted job training; nearly all said they would be

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[22] President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation, *One-Third of a Nation: A Report on Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), 5.

[23] Ibid., A-1.

[24] Ibid., A-7.

[25] Ibid., A-10, A-22, A-23, A-26.

[26] Ibid., A-7, A-12. At the time of the report, the unemployment rate for nonwhite males, ages 14-19, was roughly double that of white males in the same age group. See page 6.

willing to leave home for a training program.[27] The Task Force recommended the immediate establishment of a "nationwide manpower conservation program to provide persons who fail to meet the qualifications for military service with the needed education, training, health rehabilitation and related services that will enable them to become effective and self-supporting citizens."[28]

The team assigned to the development of legislative proposals for the Johnson administration's War on Poverty relied heavily on *One-Third of a Nation* as they sought to formulate an agenda.[29] One member of the group, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, had been largely responsible for the creation of the Task Force.[30] Moynihan took a particular interest in issues of race and unemployment, and in November 1964, he began work on a report meant for internal use that examined issues of race, unemployment, and the family.[31]

The document he produced, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*, argued that, in terms of income, employment opportunities, and education, the "gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society [was] widening" because "the Negro family in urban ghettos [was] crumbling."[32] Although the Moynihan Report acknowledged that poverty in

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[27] Ibid., A-16, A-17, A-19, A-20.

[28] Ibid., 2.

[29] Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report*, 18-19.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 19, 25.

[32] Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* reprinted in Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), 45. The report's conclusions, when leaked to the public, caused a lively public debate among intellectuals and policymakers. For a detailed analysis of the debate, see Rainwater and Yancey.

African-American communities could be attributed to racism and "three centuries of almost unimaginable mistreatment," it concluded that the solution to the problems it outlined was "a new kind of national goal: the establishment of a stable Negro family structure."[33]

The chief fault in African-American families, Moynihan claimed, was a lack of strong male figures. The "matriarchal structure" of black family life "seriously retard[ed] the group as a whole" because American society "presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society presume such leadership and reward it."[34] Moynihan traced the historical roots of the issue, beginning with the instability of enslaved families and proceeding through urbanization, which he claimed disrupted traditional social arrangements and encouraged crime and substance abuse. Such urban problems were compounded by a lack of educational and employment opportunities, which furthered undermined men's place as the heads of households.[35]

African-American men were forced to acquiesce to this loss of power in order to survive. The Jim Crow system in the nineteenth-century South developed out of "an attitude unquestionably based in some measure on fear."[36] Because men were more likely than women to have occasion to use public facilities, Jim Crow was most effective in targeting men. Moreover, men were more likely to suffer psychologically, since "segregation, and the

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[33] Ibid., 45.

[34] Ibid., 75.

[35] Ibid., 61-65.

[36] Ibid., 62.

submissiveness it exacts, is surely more destructive to the male than to the female personality."[37] Because black men were especially hated and feared, a social order developed for the purpose of "keeping the Negro 'in his place' [could] be translated as keeping the Negro male in his place: the female was not a threat to anyone."[38] Indeed, African-American men risked their lives if they drew attention to themselves. Although the "very essence of the male animal from the bantam rooster to the four-star general is to strut," black men avoided such conspicuous and quintessentially masculine behavior because the "'sassy nigger' was lynched."[39]

The armed forces, according to the Moynihan Report, could be used to solve the problems of African-American men. As the nation's largest employer, the military could provide temporary jobs and training for young men seeking work. In so doing, it would have the added benefit of preventing them from becoming criminals or substance abusers. Although service was "at least nominally a duty of all male citizens coming of age," Moynihan claimed that, because of the high rates of failure on the AFQT discussed in *One-Third of a Nation*, the number of African-Americans in the military was "disproportionately small." Moynihan offered no suggestion for ameliorating the situation. Nonetheless, in the preceding twenty-five years, military service had "worked greatly to the advantage of those involved," with, of course, the exception of "those comparatively few who are killed or wounded in combat." Moreover, the report noted, veterans who had fulfilled their duty as citizens could expect to be accorded the "advantages that have generally followed in the form of the G.I. Bill, mortgage guarantees,

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

Federal life insurance, Civil Service preference, veterans hospitals, and veterans pensions," which were "singular, to say the least."[40]

The Moynihan Report positioned military service as an opportunity for African-American men to gain full social and economic citizenship, circumstances which would presumably encourage black men to identify with and support the aims of the federal government. Beyond the material benefits that accrued to servicemen and veterans, however, Moynihan claimed that the real social and cultural utility of service was its potential to reshape African-American masculinity. The armed forces represented a "dramatic and desperately needed change" from the "strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age." Young men could find positive role models in the military, which was "a world away from women, a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance."[41] Indeed, the report asserted that military service was "the *only* experience open to the Negro American in which he is truly treated as an equal." A young black man would be able to escape the history of racism that had forced him to adopt a submissive role in his family and community because he would see himself, and be seen by others, as "one man equal to any other man in a world where the category 'Negro' and 'white' do not exist."[42] The argument

[40] Ibid., 88.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

concluded by quoting a recent recruiting message: "In the U.S. Army you get to know what it means to be a man."[43]

In a 1966 speech given at the VFW's annual convention, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced that he intended to translate the ideas articulated in the Moynihan Report into national policy. The Department of Defense proposed to "salvage" 40,000 young men who would normally have been found unfit for military service; McNamara suggested that the number of soldiers inducted under the program could eventually reach 100,000 each year. He argued that many rejectees failed the AFQT because they had grown up in "poverty-encrusted environments" where "achievement is seldom advanced as a virtue."[44] However, the requirements for military service would not officially be lowered; McNamara argued that the new policy would entail a reassessment of the utility of aptitude tests, with special attention paid to possible cultural biases in the exams.[45] The initiative, dubbed Project 100,000, would compensate for educational deficiencies through the creation of special training programs. McNamara framed Project 100,000 as an arm of Johnson's War on Poverty, claiming that the "subterranean poor" inducted into the program would have "an opportunity to return to civilian

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[43] Ibid., 89.

[44] Homer Bigart, "M'Namara Plans to 'Salvage' 40,000 Rejected in Draft," *New York Times*, 24 August 1966, 1, 18.

[45] "Armed Forces: Second Chance," *Time*, 2 September 1966, 13. For more on the reasons that African-Americans often received low scores on the AFQT, see Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 37-41.

life with skills and aptitudes which for them and their families will reverse the downward spiral of human decay."[46]

The initiative easily exceeded its recruiting goals. Between 1966 and 1968, 240,000 men entered the military via Project 100,000, and many more who were not officially associated with the program enlisted under the new admission standards. About twelve percent of those in the military were African-American, a number roughly proportionate to the figure for the overall population, but forty-one percent of the Project 100,000 inductees were black. One Marine recruiter in Oakland recalled special efforts to appeal to African-American youths: "we use[d] their language…You know, we [said] man. We even call[ed] the cops 'pigs.'"[47] Another observed that "a really big selling point" was the notion that "everybody starts out *even* at boot camp. Then it's up to you, as a man, to make it on your own. Man to man."[48]

Media coverage of African-Americans in the military initially reinforced the Johnson administration's claims about the benefits of service. General William Westmoreland, the American commander in Vietnam, announced: "The Negro soldier's come into his own. This is one of the most dramatic stories of the war. He has the self-respect he didn't have before. You can't tell the difference between Negro and white soldiers." In August 1966, *Newsweek* featured a cover story entitled "The Great Society—In Uniform," and in December of the same year, *Time* ran an article on "The Integrated Society." Both magazines offered numerous interviews

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[46] Bigart, "M'Namara Plans to 'Salvage' 40,000 Rejected in Draft." For more on Project 100,000 in the context of the War on Poverty and the demands of the draft, see Lisa Hsiao, "Project 100,000: The Great Society's Answer to Military Manpower Needs in Vietnam," *Vietnam Generation* 1:2, 14-37.

[47] Peter Barnes, *Pawns: The Plight of the Citizen-Soldier* (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1972), 67.

[48] Ibid.

with African-American soldiers who stressed that their white counterparts treated them as equals; one dismissed Black Power as "a bunch of nuts."[49]

However, Project 100,000 ultimately did little to "salvage" disadvantaged Americans.[50] Congress refused to appropriate funds for the program and, consequently, the training programs promised by McNamara never materialized.[51] Project 100,000 recruits generally underwent the same training cycle as other inductees. McNamara claimed that this would be advantageous, since "these men should never be singled out or stigmatized as a special group." But commanding officers, who were frequently able to identify the so-called "New Standards Men," complained they were unable to perform even simple daily tasks. Ridiculed as the "moron corps" by officers and fellow enlisted men, Project 100,000 inductees frequently grew frustrated and went AWOL. Those who deserted were sometimes given undesirable discharges that prevented them from securing employment when they returned to civilian life; their military service thus placed them at a disadvantage.[52] Those who made it through basic training were often unable to

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[49] These quotes are reproduced in Andrew Jonathan Huebner, *The Embattled Americans: A Cultural History of Soldiers and Veterans, 1941-1982* (dissertation, Brown University, 2004), 279, 281. Huebner stresses that "black GIs in the fully-integrated military of the 1960s appeared just as brave, committed, and skilled as their white comrades," at least in the years from 1965-1967. Huebner also notes that positive press coverage of African-American military personnel and, indeed, the soldiers themselves, "often linked the terms of manliness directly to soldiering." See Huebner, 279-281, 289-294.

[50] Lawrence Baskir and William Strauss argue that Project 100,000 was politically expedient because it allowed the Johnson administration to wage war in Vietnam "without resorting to the dramatic and politically undesirable alternative of mobilizing the reserves or ending college and other popular deferments. The war…did not have to disrupt the daily lives of more affluent and politically vocal citizens." Lawrence M Baskir and William A. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, The War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 123.

[51] Ibid. The lack of funding was predictable; in 1965, Congress had refused Johnson's request that it appropriate funds for a very similar program.

[52] Ibid., 128-129.

qualify for further training in advanced military specialties. Over forty percent of New Standards Men were assigned to combat units that offered little opportunity for those who survived their tours of duty to learn skills applicable in civilian jobs.[53]

Civil rights and Black Power leaders charged that the program hurt black communities by funneling disproportionately large numbers of African Americans into combat units, a situation that led to high casualty rates for black soldiers.[54] A CORE official, Lincoln Lynch, termed the initiative "vicious and cruel." He also objected to McNamara's use of the word "salvage," which he viewed as an inapt description of a plan that would "pour more black men into that criminal war."[55] Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee claimed that McNamara was "out to exterminate" black men.[56] Representative Adam Clayton Powell condemned efforts to overhaul the military testing system, particularly a draft deferment exam that attempted to assess whether potential recruits were "college material." Those who passed were encouraged to continue their educations; those who failed were subject to the draft. Powell compared the tests to "Hitler's twin system of eugenics and education—[they] weed out the intellectually deprived or socially undesirable by conscripting them for cannon fodder."[57]

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[53] Ibid., 129. Historian Herman Graham has argued, however, that despite the program's flaws, some Project 100,000 men "managed to avoid becoming victims of their social condition by devising both individual and collective strategies to resist their subordination….some individuals exploited their hegemonic role in order to learn useful skills, attain promotions, and provide for their families." Herman Graham III, *The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 20.

[54] For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Sol Stern, "When the Black G.I. Comes Back From Vietnam," *New York Times*, 24 March 1968, SM27.

[55] "Armed Forces: Second Chance," *Time*, 2 September 1966, 13.

[56] Ibid.

[57] "Why the Draft System May Case Racial Crisis," *Sepia*, December 1966, 52.

The Defense Department "portrayed African-American soldiers as manly patriots" in order to deflect criticisms of the casualty rates.[58] Officials suggested that black servicemen were more willing to accept dangerous assignments and were "more heroic under fire" than white soldiers.[59] One Pentagon spokesman noted, for example, that "Negroes comprise 20-25% of the personnel in the elite all-volunteer Airborne units of the Army who bore much of the brunt of much of the fighting…Consequently, the percentage of Negroes among the fatalities…was in the same percentage range."[60] *Sepia* magazine's dismissal of these explanations as "sugar-coated" reflected the sentiments of many African Americans.[61]

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Despite the failures of Project 100,000 and the dangers of combat, many African Americans initially agreed with bureaucratic assessments suggesting service in the armed forces could benefit individuals and perhaps entire communities. Wartime service offered soldiers a steady paycheck and a chance to serve their country. For black men, it also seemed—at least for a short time—to promise opportunities to escape the prejudice that characterized civilian life and even to gain full citizenship. These hopes quickly faded, however, as concerns about racism in

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[58] Graham, *The Brothers' Vietnam War*, 22.

[59] "Why the Draft System May Case Racial Crisis."

[60] "Letters to the Editor," *Sepia*, February 1966, 8.

[61] "Why the Draft System May Case Racial Crisis."

the military grew and returning servicemen discovered that Vietnam veterans were more often treated with suspicion than with respect.[62]

Economic circumstances prompted many black men to enlist and reenlist in the armed forces and to volunteer for especially dangerous assignments.[63] A profile of African-American soldiers explained, "unemployment among Negro youth is so critical that many enlist to escape the boredom and defeat of slum ghetto living. Many reenlist rather than return to substandard homes in crowded slums."[64] Victor Hall, a six-year veteran, first joined the military after losing a college scholarship. He was discharged at the end of his first tour with savings that enabled him to marry and resume his education. However, he had trouble finding a job and returned to the military "as a refuge." Hall believed that "a dire need for money in most Negro cases" was the reason that three times as many African-Americans as whites reenlisted in the military.[65] Many black soldiers attended jump school not, as the Pentagon claimed, out of a desire to be heroes, but because paratroopers earned an extra fifty-five dollars a month. Lee Ward Jackson joined an airborne unit because he wanted to send extra money to his mother, but recalled: "I didn't know what I was getting into. I nearly quit the first time I had to jump, but I just kept it in my mind why I was doing it."[66]

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[62] Herman Graham makes a similar argument about the appeal the Vietnam-era military held for African-American men. See Graham, *The Brothers' Vietnam War,* 15-29.

[63] See also Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 14-15.

[64] "Viet Nam: Every youth must face the fact of involvement," *Ebony*, August 1967, 25.

[65] Gene Grove, "The Army and the Negro," *New York Times*, 24 July 1966, 163.

[66] Ibid.

Patriotism or a sincere belief in the importance of American objectives in Southeast Asia prompted others to join.[67] Ulysses C. Kendall reminded *Ebony*'s readers that he was "fighting for a cause…both to protect the U.S.—in the long run—and to protect the rights of the South Vietnamese people."[68] Another soldier, who described himself as "a Negro and a fighting American who is proud of his country," asserted that war in Vietnam was necessary because "Communism threatens not only my country, but the rest of the free world."[69] Many expressed dismay over antiwar demonstrations at home, and Noble Sissle Jr. argued, "Mr. Muhammad Ali along with Dr. Carmichael and Dr. King would not be able to tell the Negro youth to refuse to fight if our Communist enemies were running the U.S."[70] The situation that confronted some soldiers arriving in Vietnam persuaded them to support the war. Charles Sumler's observation of the living conditions of the South Vietnamese people taught him "how it feels to be free"; he aimed to secure the same freedom for others. Though he was "once an unwilling kid," his wartime experiences had made him a "proud man."[71]

Indeed, the Moynihan Report's claim that military service meant equality of opportunity rang true to many serving in Vietnam. Captain Sylvain Wailes credited military discipline with the eradication of overt prejudice. The Army, he explained, "is a forced society. The Army can make people conform. When they say there will be equal opportunity, there will be, regardless

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[67] See also Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 14-15.

[68] "Viet Nam: Every youth must face the fact of involvement," 28.

[69] William Henry Harris, "Letters to the Editor," *Ebony*, November 1967, 14, 16.

[70] Noble Sissle Jr., "Letters to the Editor," *Ebony*, November 1967, 16.

[71] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, November 1968, 55.

of individuals."[72] According to one Marine, in Vietnam, there were "no color lines." Moreover, he hoped that soldiers, white and black, who had "fought together and lived together as brothers for over a year" would "continue to work together" in civilian life.[73] These feelings were echoed by another soldier, who asserted: "You can't just live in a foxhole together, drink out of the same canteen, cover fire for each other and then go back and say 'go to hell.'"[74] A writer for *Time* magazine noted approvingly a Navy lieutenant's observation that racial distinctions seemed less important in war than in civilian life and suggested that the lieutenant's "hopeful sentiment reflect[ed] a concern with full citizenship…far beyond the desperate banalities of Negro dissidents in the U.S."[75] Indeed, many men anticipated that their military service would help them earn respect at home. An Army captain observed that African-American officers often wore their uniforms while traveling in the South because they hoped that their military status would mitigate reactions to their skin color.[76]

For many, the conflict in Vietnam represented a chance to secure full citizenship. Indeed, African Americans had long noted that times of war created opportunities to prove their ability and loyalty through military service and often lead to social upheavals in which a redefinition of citizenship seemed possible.[77] Recent developments in the armed forces, and the social and

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[72] Grove, "The Army and the Negro," 163.

[73] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, March 1968, 77.

[74] "Viet Nam: Every youth must face the fact of involvement," 28.

[75] "Democracy in the Foxhole," *Time*, 26 May 1967, 18.

[76] Grove, "The Army and the Negro," 163.

[77] Philip A. Klinkner, with Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, 1-4. Several scholars have examined the links between military service and civil rights activism, especially in the post-World War II

political climate of the United States in the 1960s, revived black servicemen's hopes. The U.S. force in Vietnam had been integrated from the beginning; officials in the Department of Defense and the White House stressed the importance of equality in the military. And in civilian life, the civil rights and Black Power movements were gaining momentum; significant social change seemed a realistic goal.[78] Dismissing the importance of "medals, citations, and praises," one soldier explained that he chose to fight in Vietnam because he hoped that "even after several hundred years of lies and broken promises, America will one day fulfill the basic assertions of her Constitution and Bill of Rights." This, he thought, could be accomplished by "insuring that freedom and equality become a reality for all Americans."[79]

Some soldiers believed that demonstrations of courage in battle would prove their manhood and help them gain equality. As one historian has put it: "The U.S. military was selling manhood during the Vietnam war, and African-American men were eager to buy."[80] A paratrooper volunteered for dangerous assignments because "when you've been called 'boy' all your life, you want to prove that you're a man."[81] Army volunteer James M. Johnson was

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and Vietnam eras. For example, Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Steve Estes, *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Charles M. Payne*, I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995).

[78] Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 1-3.

[79] Thomas M. Searight, "Letters to the Editor," *Ebony*, September 1969, 22.

[80] Graham, *The Brothers' Vietnam War*, 15.

[81] Richard Armstrong, "'I'm Going to Make It—I've Got To,'" *Saturday Evening Post*, 4 May 1968, 79.

confident that the strategy was effective: "We know we are winning both the war here, and specifically, equality for the colored man at home. We are proving that we stand just as tall and brave and dignified as any other man."[82] Others were less certain. One concluded that the "big question" was "whether the black cat can walk like a dragon here in South Vietnam and like a fairy back in the land of the Big PX."[83]

Glowing reports about the activities of black servicemen abroad reinforced the notion that black troops were proving their worth. Ted Sell, a *Los Angeles Times* correspondent, acknowledged that African-Americans had "served with honor and distinction in earlier wars"; it was, therefore, "regrettable that the Negro had to re-earn a place for himself in American society through brave deeds in Vietnam." These difficulties aside, Sell opined, "the performance of Negro soldiers in battles…provided a new argument against the white supremacists."[84] A cover story in *Time* lapsed into purple prose in its summary of how the "performance of the Negro G.I. under fire reaffirm[ed] the success—and diversity—of the American experiment." A black soldier, the author explained, "may fight to prove his manhood—perhaps as a corrective to the matriarchal dominance of the Negro ghetto back home—or to save Viet Nam for a government in Saigon about which he himself is cynical." In the end, he fought "for the dignity of the Negro, to shatter the stereotypes of racial inferiority, to win the judgment of noncoms and officers of whatever color: 'He's got the tickets.'"[85] However, the author's description of the typical

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[82] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, December 1967, 65.

[83] Thomas A. Johnson, "Negro in Vietnam Uneasy About U.S.," *New York Times*, 1 May 1968, 1, 14.

[84] Ted Sell, "Amid the Antiwar Shouting, Negroes Win Rightful Place, respect in Armed Services," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 1967, L1, L2.

[85] "Democracy in the Foxhole," *Time*, 26 May 1967, 15.

African-American serviceman indicated that some racial stereotypes remained to be "shattered." "Often inchoate and inconsistent, instinctively self-serving, yet naturally altruistic," the article explained, "the Negro fighting man is both savage in combat and gentle in his regard for the Vietnamese. He can clean out a bunker load of Viet Cong with a knife and two hand grenades, or offer smokes to a captured V.C. and then squat beside him trying to communicate in bastard Vietnamese."[86]

By 1968, however, racial tensions began to eclipse optimism about the possibilities for change. African-American G.I.s complained that the military was rife with institutional and individual racism. They noted that the blacks were promoted infrequently, and African Americans were more likely than whites to be convicted and harshly punished by military courts or to receive undesirable discharges. Moreover, encounters between individual soldiers were often fraught with racism.[87] Private Donnel Jones explained: "There are many sergeants and officers from the Deep South who think the Afro-American should still be in slavery, and they treat us soul brothers as such….I had the honor of saving the life of a white man who later called me a black nigger."[88] David Parks, publishing portions of his Vietnam diary in *Look* magazine, charged that African Americans and Puerto Ricans were routinely given especially hazardous or dirty jobs by a sergeant who told him that "Negroes are lazy and won't help themselves." Parks concluded: "Whitey is the same throughout this whole damn organization. Somehow, I thought

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 2-7, 37-93. Westheider traces the shift in attitudes to 1968; my research supports his periodization.

[88] Donnel Jones, "Letters to the Editor," *Sepia*, August 1968, 6.

it would be different over here, where survival is the thing. But that seems to cut no ice with Mister Pale."[89] Joseph Daryl Miles's experiences in what he termed "the most racist institution I've seen" prompted cynicism about promises of equal opportunity in the military. He observed: "We got a whole lot of freedom on the battlefield, a whole lot of democracy in the foxhole, a whole lot of equality to die."[90]

The growing number of recruits who brought the ideas and cultural practices of the Black Power movement into the military undermined Defense Department claims that the military was a model of racial integration and opportunity for young black men. Many officers and enlisted men wore Afros and greeted one another with black power salutes.[91] African-American Marines stationed in Da Nang flew a flag that declared the importance of Black Power in Vietnam and their determination to ensure equal treatment at home. The flag featured a red background that represented "blood shed by blacks in the war and in the race conflict in America," while the black foreground stood for the "face of black culture." Crossed spears and a shield in its center meant "violence if necessary," though the wreath that surrounded them indicated a desire for peace. A line in Swahili warned, "My fear is for you."[92] One survey found that 57 percent of black GIs endorsed a return to either racially segregated units or the creation of an all-black military, while 60 percent wished to live only with other African-American soldiers. Indeed, black troops in rear areas often constructed segregated living quarters. A serviceman living in

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[89] "Veteran Tells Injustice," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 5 March 1968, 4.

[90] Quoted in Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 78.

[91] Terry, "Bringing the War Home." For a more detailed discussion of the significance of these trends, see Graham, *The Brothers' Vietnam War*, 105-109.

[92] Terry, "Bringing the War Home."

the "Little Ghetto" in Da Nang endorsed these arrangements: "You can do your thing and be yourself. You can't talk and act natural when you're around the beast." In Saigon, a "Soul Kitchen" catered to the palates and political inclinations of African Americans.[93] White soldiers often responded to these trends with derision or even violence. Following the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., white troops in Vietnam burned crosses and flew Confederate flags. For some African Americans, such displays confirmed the necessity of violence in their struggle for equality. Seaman James Cannon believed that the Black Panthers were an "equalizer," noting, "The beast got his Ku Klux Klan. The Black Panthers gives the beast something to fear like we feared from the Ku Klux Klan all our lives." Another sailor declared, "The honkies made the Panthers violent like they are."[94]

These tensions extended to military bases in the U.S. as well as in Vietnam. Violent clashes between black and white Marines at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina highlighted the problem and drew the attention of top military officials. On July 20, 1969, after several less serious incidents, African-American and Puerto Rican servicemen attacked a group of whites, one of whom died.[95] Tensions on the base had been building for some time. White enlisted men and officers were offended by African-American Marines' tendency to greet one another with black power salutes and insistence on wearing "Afro-styled haircuts, a symbol of militancy in many urban areas." Moreover, many soldiers insisted that they were "black Marines," rejecting a popular slogan that declared that there were "no white Marines and no black Marines, only

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Thomas A. Johnson, "Marine Chief Vows to End Racial Rift," *New York Times*, 16 August 1969, 1, 14.

green Marines."[96] African Americans responded to complaints about displays of racial pride by noting that many whites at the camp flew confederate flags, and complained that only a "Negro Uncle Tom" could secure a promotion.[97] Marine Corps commandant General Leonard F. Chapman acknowledged that the incident indicated that the corps had been "less successful than we thought in stopping racial outbursts. There is no question about it, we've got a problem."[98] Although fights between Marines were to be expected and could even "help build individual confidence [and] unit spirit," Chapman said, "racial fights could destroy the corps."[99] A Marine colonel noted that the men at the camp had recently returned from Vietnam and suggested that the tensions stemmed from readjustment difficulties.[100]

Indeed, men serving in Vietnam often suggested that they were prepared to take violent action to secure full citizenship upon their return to the United States and endorsed the positions of militant black leaders. 72 percent of respondents to one survey approved of Eldridge Cleaver and 70 percent endorsed Malcolm X, while moderates like Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the Urban League received approval ratings of 53 and 51 percent. A serviceman who declared his admiration for the "militant brothers" opined, "Nonviolence didn't do anything but get Martin Luther King killed."[101] One medic believed that the experience of

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[96] Ibid., 14.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 1.

[99] Thomas A. Johnson, "Armed Forces: Racial Violence Mars the Integration Record," *New York Times*, 17 August 1969, E6.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Terry, "Bringing the War Home." A 1972 survey of 199 African-American veterans, however, found that, while a majority approved of the Congress of Racial Equality and the Student Nonviolent

serving with black men had taught his white counterparts "how we as a race feel about what's going on in the world." Ideally, he said, he could "just go home to a nice quiet life with his family," but in the absence of "peace at home," he would be "looking to the long, hot summer."[102] Others were even less optimistic about the prospects for racial justice stateside. According to Charles R. King, black enlisted men, a few "Toms" excepted, were unhappy about serving in Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, as in earlier wars, "the black man ha[d] been a good fighting man," but Americans still refused "to fully accept the black man," as evidenced by "the way things [were] worsening back home." King observed that it was "hard to fight in a foreign land for other people's freedom, when that one doesn't have freedom back home….But I will be out of this place soon, and when I do get home, I won't stand to be pushed around by anyone!"[103] One black G.I. declared that "Negro and white troops are determined that the blood and lives of friends on an unsegregated rice paddy or steaming jungle front will not be lost for the return to a condition in which we left." He warned: "If the white discriminator thinks the war in Viet Nam is one of fierce fighting and bloodshed, it will seem a game compared to the action resulting from an ex-Viet Nam troop being segregated from those things he fought to save while away in Viet Nam. First class citizenship…will be a must."[104]

Coordinating Committee, a bare third endorsed H. Rap Brown, Malcolm X, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, the Black Muslims, and the Black Panthers. See James M. Fendrich, "The Returning Black Vietnam Era Veteran," *Social Service Review*, March 1972.

[102] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, July 1968, 75.

[103] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, December 1968, 60.

[104] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, September 1967, 57.

Many veterans confirmed that military service had done little or nothing to improve their civilian lives. After his tour of duty, Lance Corporal Charles Smith was "ashamed" that he had fought in Vietnam; his experiences upon returning home had convinced him that "this country isn't worth the lives being lost."[105] A Chicago veteran recalled a recent run-in with a police officer: "Here I spend a year in Vietnam and then I come home and gotta stand up to a cop with a gun in his hand and he's beating the hell out of me. I felt lousy about it, man. Things are as bad as they were when I enlisted."[106] Jerome Johns, a former career sergeant wounded in Vietnam, endorsed the creation of job training programs for vets, which he believed would help "unprogram" men who had been trained to kill. "Whenever I see something about a killing in a paper," he said, "I look to see if it was done by a Vietnam veteran…You remember how we had to *motivate* these kids to kill; we *programmed* them to kill, man….Well, nobody's *unprogramming* them."[107] The director of an Urban League veterans program summed up the situation: "Every Negro veteran I talk with is either mad as hell or crazy or white."[108]

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African-American veterans skeptical about the rewards of military service prompted unease among Americans who feared that vets' efforts to secure full citizenship would

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[105] "Our Men in Vietnam," *Sepia*, January 1968, 79.

[106] "The Negro View: A Special Anguish," *Newsweek*, 10 July 1967, 34.

[107] Peter T. Chew, "The Forgotten Soldiers, Black Vets Say They're Ignored," *National Observer*, 10 March 1973.

[108] Thomas A. Johnson, "Negro Veteran is Confused and Bitter," *New York Times*, 29 July 1968, 1, 14.

degenerate into violence. Such concerns were spurred in part by the growing radicalism of black leaders, some of whom had begun to suggest that equality would be gained only through violent revolt. Commentary in the press often noted that returning servicemen were disciplined soldiers trained in strategies of guerrilla warfare, and thus singularly equipped to fight in such a revolution. Their claims thus elaborated on stereotypes of combat-hardened Vietnam veterans unable to readjust to civilian life.

Discussions of the problems of black veterans sometimes implied that vets' efforts to create masculine identities were at the center of the problem. African Americans' experiences in the armed forces did not generally bear out Daniel Patrick Moynihan's argument about the ways in which service would rebuild soldiers' manhood. Moreover, many veterans who were unable to find jobs or support families felt emasculated. After he was discharged from the Army, Lester Price moved from Akron, Ohio to Los Angeles in search of work; he finally secured a position cleaning toilets at the City Hall Annex. Price asked, "Is this any job for a *man*?"[109] Black men's notions of masculinity were changing; "real" men were no longer warriors, but radicals.[110] Some organizations encouraged African Americans to reject military service. For example, a group in Harlem called Black Women Enraged asked men to remain home and "protect us, their women and children, from the white rapist." Flyers commanded: "Choose jail. Stay here and fight for your manhood. Black women will not allow you to stand alone in your decision."[111] Because of

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[109] Armstrong, "'I'm Going to Make It—I've Got To,'" 78.

[110] Graham, *The Brothers' Vietnam War,* 12-14.

[111] Ibid., 28.

this redefinition of African-American masculinity, some observers thought it especially likely that black vets would choose to join militant movements.

In the late 1960s, stories about the complaints of black veterans appeared regularly in the mainstream press; they often implied that African-American vets could be expected to respond to injustices—real or perceived—with force. Writer C.L. Sulzberger dismissed the importance of race relations in Vietnam, but argued that the return of 50,000 black soldiers each year made the issue "immensely significant to the United States." He noted that military service had done little to improve the civilian standing of young African Americans, and warned: "If we can't act rapidly and fundamentally on this terrible issue spinning out of Vietnam, we are in for increments of trouble on the streets of American cities. A new élite of impatient, war-hardened youths is coming home to provide shock-troops in a battle for real equal rights—if these are not already accorded."[112] In 1968, journalist Sol Stern believed that it was still too soon to say whether a majority of vets would "resort to guns."[113] However, he noted, "it is extremely dangerous to use the military to solve racial problems in a society that is torn by racial conflict…when racial conflict reaches its violent climax, it will be fought on both sides with more military sophistication and more lethal weapons and by young men grown accustomed to killing."[114]

The findings of African-American scholars reinforced these ideas. Dr. Napoleon N. Vaughn, a clinical psychologist, described black veterans as "an individual mesh of men whose

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[112] C.L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: The Spin-Out," *New York Times*, 21 May 1969, 46.

[113] Stern, "When the Black GI Comes Back from Vietnam," SM27.

[114] Ibid.

energies can go to help the system and their brothers—or destroy both." He explained that African-American veterans were especially disappointed that they had not received the training needed to secure civilian jobs while in the military, even though the armed forces had become "the average ghetto youth's 'college.'"[115] Wallace Terry, a fellow at Harvard University and *Time*'s deputy bureau chief in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969, wrote a 1970 article in *The Black Scholar* in which he explained that the attitudes of black servicemen had undergone a significant shift while he was in Vietnam. Like other observers, he noted that African-American veterans were "schooled in the arts of guerilla war…and determined to earn their share of American opportunities even if that means becoming Black Panthers or turning to guns." Terry conducted a survey that found that almost 50 percent of black enlisted men were prepared to use weapons to secure racial justice, while another 13 percent were willing to consider the possibility. One man warned, "Half the brothers over here can build their own weapons. They are going back ready for anything." Another predicted that efforts to deprive him of equal rights would end in bloodshed: "The man who says that, I'm going to try to kill him. If I can't kill him, he's going to wish he were dead."[116]

Such suggestions found a receptive audience in a nation where outbreaks of racially motivated violence were common in inner cities. Indeed, Terry claimed that a significant number of those serving in the military in 1970 were "yesterday's rioters," men who had rejected nonviolence after the 1968 deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. A Chicago man whose nephew was serving in Vietnam predicted: "You think we had a riot last year?

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[115] Acel Moore and Gerald McKelvey, "Back From War, Black Veterans Ignored and Bitter," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 February 1971.

[116] Terry, "Bringing the War Home."

That's nothing like it's gonna be if these boys find things the same when they come home."[117] His comment appeared in a *Newsweek* feature on the "special anguish" of black troops that outlined the discontent in many African-American communities over inequities in the draft system and at home and explained why many believed the war itself was racist. For many African Americans, however, the author opined, "the immediate reality is the unfinished war at home, the war for equality and against the wretched conditions of Negro life in the U.S."[118]

The notion that African-American soldiers and veterans were fighting two wars—for freedom in Vietnam and freedom at home—was a common rhetorical device.[119] Senator J. William Fulbright, reflecting on a recent outburst of violence in Detroit, declared that America was fighting two wars. The first was in Vietnam, but the second was "a war for America's soul…being fought on the streets of Newark and Detroit and in the halls of Congress, in churches and protest meetings and on college campuses, and in the hearts and minds of silent Americans from Maine to Hawaii."[120] Fulbright warned that the two wars had "set in motion a process of deterioration in American society." War abroad had diverted resources from Great Society programs, he argued, leaving those living in poverty desperate for a solution to their

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[117] "The Negro View: A Special Anguish," 34. The details of the riot to which the man refers are unclear. There were racially-motivated riots in Chicago in the summer of 1966, but they primarily involved the Puerto Rican community. In 1966, there were also significant outbreaks of racial violence in Pasadena, Atlanta, Omaha, Cleveland, and San Francisco.

[118] "The Negro View: A Special Anguish," 36.

[119] For an extensive discussion of this phenomenon, see Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*. Such language was not unique to the Vietnam era; African-American activists and veterans articulated similar ideas during World War II. An interesting analysis of the postwar struggle written during the Vietnam era is Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest During World War II," *Journal of American History* 60 (December 1973, 692-713.

[120] J. W. Fulbright, "The Great Society is a Sick Society," *New York Times,* 20 August 1967, SM30.

problems. Moreover, "ugly and shocking thoughts…forged in the Vietnam crucible" suggested that "riots and sniper's bullets [could] bring the white man to an awareness of the Negro's plight," much as a "rain of bombs" was employed "to bring Ho Chi Minh to reason."[121] The senator cited a political cartoon that depicted one black soldier saying to another: "This will be great training for civilian life." Unless more federal funds were devoted to anti-poverty programs, he asserted, the cartoon's prediction would come true.[122] A black vet "standing in the smoke and rubble of Detroit" illustrated Fulbright's point. "I just got back from Vietnam a few months ago," he said, "but you know, I think the war is here."[123]

Some veterans chose to join militant organizations; Wallace Terry found that as many as 30 percent of black GIs were considering the possibility.[124] Thomas Johnson of the *New York Times* conducted an unscientific survey of veterans around the country and concluded that the "typical" vet was "bitter" and "disappoint[ed] in America."[125] Johnson reminded readers that these conditions were encouraging to militant black leaders who hoped to win over vets whose "anger at a racist America will make them a highly effective cadre in leading youths in a racial civil war."[126] One veteran, Clarence Guthrie, had already joined a radical organization because he believed that whites planned to "massacre" African Americans. According to Guthrie,

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Terry, "Bringing the War Home."

[125] Johnson, "Negro Veteran is Confused and Bitter," 1.

[126] Ibid., 14.

members of the group didn't "intend to be on our knees praying when they come. We're gonna die fighting, on our feet, and take a whole lot of them with us." Moreover, he was uninterested in anti-poverty initiatives and other programs aimed at creating equal opportunity. Instead of "asking the man for what they need," Guthrie asserted, "we're going to start taking what's ours. We fought for the honkie and now we're going to fight for ourselves."[127] G. Wuesi, a black vet living in Watts, scoffed at a *Saturday Evening Post* writer who mentioned nonviolent strategies for change. "Nonviolence?" he responded. "The white boy doesn't respect nonviolence. Power cannot be granted. It must be taken."[128]

Moderate civil rights leaders warned that vets might resort to violence in order to achieve equality and called for federal programs that would smooth the transition to civilian life. Whitney Young explained that service in Vietnam had been a transformative experience for many men, who had "developed sophistication, confidence in [their] own ability, and a sense of well-being in an integrated climate." The African-American veteran was "a man accustomed to discharging duty and exercising responsibility. He is used to commanding the respect he has justly earned. And these are the spoils of battle he will bring with him when he returns to America."[129] Vets were "not prepared to return to the same old discriminatory conditions, the second-class citizenship, and instant oblivion which greeted the Negro veteran of former wars."[130] And men who possessed "the skills of guerrilla warfare, of killing, of subversion" were

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Armstrong, "'I'm Going to Make It—I've Got To,'" 79.

[129] Whitney M. Young, Jr., "When the Negroes in Vietnam Come Home," *Harper's*, June 1967, 64.

[130] Ibid., 69.

"a force the nation can ill afford to have embittered."[131] The government and private industry, Young claimed, would have to work together to provide education, training, and employment for returning servicemen.[132] If they failed to do so, African-American vets "could make Rap Brown look like Little Lord Fauntleroy."[133] Another Urban League official, West Point graduate Lewis C. Olive, recalled: "Veteran after veteran has publicly told committees of state legislatures that he will rip off people if he can't find decent work. These people aren't joking."[134] An editorial in the *Chicago Defender* posited that veterans, "having been treated wholly as equals in the war-front community…will not accept second-class-citizen status or treatment without violent reaction." The dearth of economic and social opportunities for vets, therefore, "should occupy high priority of concern by both federal and city governments."[135] Former Navy Seabee Barry C. Wright, founder of Negro Veterans of Viet Nam (NVOV), explained that most vets "would rather help build America than destroy it."[136] Wright tried to head off the possibility of veterans working with black militants by circulating NVOV recruitment letters among troops still in-country and establishing a job training program in

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[131] Ibid., 65, 69.

[132] Ibid., 69.

[133] Quoted in Stern, "When the Black GI Comes Back from Vietnam." H. Rap Brown, the Justice Minister of the Black Panther Party, famously declared, "Violence is as American as cherry pie." See H. Rap Brown, Jamil Al-Amin, and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Die Nigger Die! A Political Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2002), 144.

[134] Peter T. Chew, "The Forgotten Soldiers, Black Vets Say They're Ignored," *National Observer*, 10 March 1973.

[135] "Black Veterans," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 19 February 1968, 13.

[136] "The Black Man in Vietnam," *Bay State Banner* (Boston, MA), 19 September 1968, 10.

Chicago. However, Wright cautioned, "The Negro serviceman is confused…he hears about all the trouble back home and knows that when he returns he will have to take a stand."[137]

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A "jittery" Department of Defense was already working to create assistance programs for African-American veterans.[138] Policymakers largely shared the views of observers in the press who feared that poverty and racism would goad vets into aggressive action. Therefore, Pentagon officials, with the encouragement of the White House, created programs aimed at returning African-American servicemen and lent support to the Urban League's efforts to assist black veterans. The majority of these initiatives were employment projects premised on the notion that poverty was the chief source of dissatisfaction among veterans. Some sought to channel skills learned in the military into occupations that government officials deemed useful; many vets were trained as police officers in cities with large African-American populations. Programs for black veterans were developed primarily to avert violence.[139]

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[137] Ibid. See also "New Vets Group Seeking Change," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 23 October 1968, 5. According to Wright, the organization had about 5,000 members nationwide.

[138] Stern, "When the Black GI Comes Back from Vietnam."

[139] Herman Graham notes that Project Transition was established in response to the "prospect of alienated black men enlisting in radical organizations" and posits that "the program was not very effective," since unemployment rates among African-American veterans remained relatively high. However, Graham also observes: "Few veterans became members of black nationalist organizations….most veterans—preoccupied with the challenges of repatriation and family responsibilities—had neither the interest nor the liberty to join black nationalist paramilitary groups." Graham, *The Brothers' Vietnam War*, 138.

In October 1967, Vice President Hubert Humphrey asked Robert McNamara to smooth the transition to civilian life for recently discharged black soldiers in order to combat "dissatisfaction and discontent" in African-American communities. Humphrey summarized a recent series of interviews with young African Americans that had produced "feedback that Negro servicemen returning from Vietnam are having quite an impact on the young Negro in terms of their attitude toward the war and the draft. Some of them, regrettably, are coming back physically not in good shape and without jobs, and are a source of great dissatisfaction and discontent." These findings had created some consternation in the White House, Humphrey said, and he urged McNamara to ensure that "before Vietnamese combat returnees are mustered out there [is] a special effort made to prepare them for employment and to make sure that when they come out they will be fully ready to return to civilian employment, having no physical or emotional disabilities." He concluded: "A special effort might be called for, and I am sure you will want to have the matter spot-checked."[140]

A month later, McNamara explained that, although the "nation's road to equality [was] still strewn with boulders of bias," the Defense Department was "contributing to the solution of the social problems wracking our nation" through three programs. The first two were Project 100,000 and an open housing program that aimed to eliminate discrimination in off-base housing. The third, Project Transition, was a new program that would "give the returning Negro veteran—particularly the Negro veteran who without help might be compelled to drift back into the stagnation of the urban ghetto—an opportunity for valuable training and satisfying

[140] Letter from Hubert H. Humphrey to Robert S. McNamara, 6 October 1967, "Correspondence: Memos for the Record [10/6/67-1/13/69]," Box 3, Papers of Alfred B. Fitt, LBJ Library. The interviews to which Humphrey referred were conducted by journalist Samuel Lubell.

employment."[141] The initiative was still on a pilot basis, but McNamara promised that it would be in place on all major military installations within sixty days. Project Transition was a voluntary program that allowed personnel with between 30 and 180 days of service left to begin training for civilian jobs. Men with service-connected disabilities, "those with no previous civilian occupation," and "combat arms servicemen with no civilian-related skill" would be given priority in enrollment. (The latter two categories, of course, described most of the Project 100,000 recruits; the job training they were promised under the original program had largely failed to materialize.) Most of the training would not be provided by the Department of Defense, but by cooperating state and federal agencies, including the Postal Service and police departments around the country, and by major corporations such as IBM and Ford.[142]

The Department of Defense promoted Project Transition as a means of quelling violence related to racial tensions, particularly the series of urban upheavals that had begun with a 1965 riot in Watts. McNamara suggested to David Ginsburg, the executive director of the National Commission on Civil Disorders, that Project Transition "should be pushed vigorously" as part of the solution to urban problems.[143] Moreover, the initiative worked to place graduates in jobs with police departments in cities with large African-American communities.[144] Officials

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[141] Robert S. McNamara, "Social Inequities: Urban's Racial Ills," 34:4 (1 December 1967), 98-103. The speech was delivered at the annual convention of the National Association of Education Broadcasters in Denver on November 7, 1967.

[142] Robert S. McNamara, "Social Inequities: Urban's Racial Ills," 34:4 (1 December 1967), 98-103.

[143] Draft letter from Robert S. McNamara to David Ginsburg, 10 February 1968, "Correspondence: General 1/2/68-3/30/68," Box 1, Papers of Alfred B. Fitt, LBJ Library.

[144] Memo Alfred B. Fitt to Robert S. McNamara, 12 November 1967, "Correspondence: General 9/20/67-12/29/67," Box 1, Papers of Alfred B. Fitt, LBJ Library.

theorized that black police officers would be especially effective in instances of "urban racial unrest."[145] Though some African-American leaders accused the program of an attempt to "pit blacks against blacks," others declared that Project Transition "seem[ed] to hold out much hope for servicemen to be engaged in profitable work upon their leaving the military service."[146] These initiatives also had the potential to encourage African-American vets to identify with the federal government, particularly to side with it against black radical or nationalist movements.

Though Congressional opposition to funding Project Transition and similar programs constrained the Defense Department's ability to expand the initiative, it supplemented the effort by supporting Urban League plans to create an Office of Veterans Affairs.[147] Pentagon officials agreed to provide the Urban League with information about servicemen within 90 days of discharge, including educational and family histories, service experience and assignments, and "his expectations and desires."[148] The Urban League would, in turn, assist vets seeking employment and housing. According to Whitney Young, the new Office of Veterans Affairs, which was endorsed by President Johnson, was part of an attempt to reach "unreachables,"

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[145] Memorandum for the Record, 27 September 1967, "Correspondence: Memos for the Record [10/6/67-1/13/69], Box 3, Papers of Alfred B. Fitt, LBJ Library. The Defense Department also considered giving preference on waiting lists for the Army Reserve to African-Americans in order to "reduce the lily-white character of units assigned to urban disorder duty." See Memo from Alfred B. Fitt to Paul Nitze, 3 December 1968, "Correspondence: General 7/1/68-9/13/68," Box 2, Papers of Alfred B. Fitt, LBJ Library.

[146] Johnson, "Negro in Vietnam Uneasy About U.S.," 1; "Jobs For Veterans," *Chicago Defender* (National Edition), 21 October 1967, 10.

[147] For more on the difficulties of securing Congressional funding, see, for example, Memo from Alfred B. Fitt to Clark Clifford, 16 January 1969, "Correspondence: General 10/1/68-1/30/69," Box 2, Papers of Alfred B. Fitt, LBJ Library.

[148] Lawrence E. Davies, "Urban League to Aid Negro Veterans," *New York Times*, 23 August 1967, 35.

including "the marginal and alienated man [who] resulted from the unbroken cycle of poverty and discrimination."[149] Eighty percent of the program's participants found jobs.[150]

Indeed, Project Transition and the Urban League's initiative were generally well-received and successful in helping vets who sought to secure employment. At Fort Bragg, North Carolina, over forty percent of the soldiers who trained with B.F Goodrich Tire Company eventually accepted jobs with the corporation.[151] Private Arthur Adams told a reporter for the *Chicago Defender* that he would "get ahead faster" thanks to classes provided by an oil company at Fort Knox. The reporter expected that Project Transition participants were "well on their way toward becoming independent dealers or service-station managers."[152] Ethel L. Payne, a columnist for the *Chicago Defender*, noted approvingly that Robert McNamara had become "more active in dealing with racial problems."[153] Wallace Terry offered a qualified endorsement of the Urban League's initiative, which he believed could help curb vets' inclinations to

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[149] M.S. Handler, "Whitney Young Urges Attempt Be Made To Reach Ghetto 'Unreachables,'" *New York Times*, 1 August 1966, 14. See also "Assistance Program Aids Ex-G.I.'s," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 8 February 1968, 27.

[150] Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 172-173. Westheider argues that "the programs left a lot to be desired" because they did little to assist vets in rural areas and because the education stipend provided by the Vietnam GI Bill was not generous enough to allow most veterans to attend college full-time. While this is true, many white veterans had similar difficulties with living allowances, and the concentration of programs in cities likely resulted in part from the concerns about veterans and urban violence described here.

[151] "Civilian Training…" *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 2 September 1971, 15.

[152] "Fort Knox GI's Also Train For Private Industry," *Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), 4 May 1968, 32.

[153] Ethel L. Payne, "So This Is Washington," *Chicago Defender* (National Edition), 16 December 1967, 14.

violence, but warned that the programs would need to expand and serve more veterans if they were to be successful.[154]

The Nixon administration, similarly concerned that alienated black veterans would instigate what one staffer called a "civil war," initially preserved, and even added to, Johnson-era programs.[155] Indeed, during his presidential campaign, Richard Nixon declared that African-American vets were "among the nation's greatest underutilized assets" and advocated their involvement in his proposal to create more black-owned businesses in order to end poverty in urban African-American communities.[156] In 1969, Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Robert Finch asked universities around the country to recruit African-American students eligible for GI Bill education benefits. The administration, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, theorized that "higher education [might] offer the most effective way to ease their transition to civilian life and help assure their economic success." Otherwise, the plan's proponents argued, "returning Negro servicemen could, in time, become a dangerous cadre of angered ghetto

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[154] Terry, "Bringing the War Home."

[155] Letter from Kurt Solmssen to James C. Humes, 21 May 1969, "GEN VA [1/1/69-6/30/69] [1 of 6]," Box 2, White House Central File, Subject File, Veterans Administration, Nixon Presidential Materials, National Archives II.

[156] "Nixon and Black Power," *Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), 11 May 1968, 1, 3. For more on Nixon's proposal, see Dean Kotlowski, "Black Power—Nixon Style: The Nixon Administration and Minority Business Enterprise," *The Business History Review*, 72:3 (Autumn 1998), 409-445.

militants if the Government fails to meet their needs."[157] A similar effort to encourage minority veterans to take advantage of the educational provisions of the GI Bill was made in 1971.[158]

A 1971 decision to incorporate Project Transition in a newly-created Jobs For Veterans Program angered some vets. Barry P. Wright, director of Concerned Veterans From Viet Nam, wrote to Nixon to warn him that a "revolution" would be the inevitable result of African-American veterans' inability to find work.[159] A few months later, Wright warned a Chicago television news anchor that "society is provoking a growing element within the black community to use their military skills against those who deny them their rightful place in American society" and suggested that these men should be thought of as "ghetto guerrillas."[160]

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In October 1972, in the midst of the national uproar over the De Mau Mau Gang, the *Chicago Defender* reminded its readers of Wright's comments.[161] When asked to comment on

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[157] Jonathan Spivak, "Administration Views College For Veterans As Easing City Unrest," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 September 1969, 1.

[158] OEO Announcement, 12 April 1971, "GEN VA 7 1/1/71-[12/31/72] [2 of 2] [1/1/72-12/31/72]," Box 15, White House Central File, Subject File, Veterans Administration, Nixon Presidential Materials, National Archives II.

[159] Letter from Barry P. Wright to Richard M. Nixon, 16 March 1971, "GEN VA 7 1/1/71-[12/31/72] [2 of 2] [1/1/72-12/31/72]," Box 15, White House Central Files, Subject File, Veterans Administration, Nixon Presidential Materials, National Archives II.

[160] "Wright warned of Viet vet guerrillas," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 16 October 1972, 1, 3-4.

[161] Ibid.

the apparently random killings, Wright said he believed in the innocence of the accused, but repeated his warning: "These men are trained to be guerrillas, to remove any obstacles that get in their way with violence."[162] Bart Savage, a coordinator for Vietnam Veterans Against the War, agreed that soldiers were taught to "kill indiscriminately" in Vietnam. "To stay sane over there, you have to steel yourself mentally…you have to become a robot to survive." He noted that soldiers learned to dehumanize the Vietnamese people through the use of racial epithets, and explained that when African-American vets "can't find jobs and realize they are being treated like 'dinks' and 'slopes,' they become enraged."[163] Such explanations, the *Chicago Tribune* opined, came from "apologists" who had failed to observe that among the ranks of Vietnam veterans were "hundreds of thousands of blacks," including some who had experienced significant readjustment difficulties, who had not "turn[ed] their war-taught skills against society."[164] Psychiatrist Harold M. Visotsky agreed that it was unwise to "generalize about all returning veterans. This is not only a mistake but a great danger. Hell, we've got enough danger in the street without looking in the face of every veteran and wondering if he's a killer."[165]

Yet arguments that the majority of black vets were peaceful and productive members of society did little to halt the national frenzy over the notion of a gang of violent and embittered veterans. Police in Chicago speculated that the group might be responsible for as many as 25 murders; authorities in Nebraska sought to link the accused men from Chicago to two unsolved

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[162] Phil Blake and Betty Washington, "'Men trained to kill,' says Viet vets' leader," *Chicago Daily News*, 16 October 1972, 3.

[163] Ibid.

[164] "Terrorism By Murder," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 1972, 16.

[165] Ridgely Hunt, "Bad to Generalize About Vets; Doctors," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 October 1972, 8.

killings there.[166] Indeed, as word of the arrests traveled through the nation, law enforcement officials from around the Midwest began to call Chicago police to inform them of similar slayings.[167] And investigators established a national hotline in an attempt to link the suspects with "unsolved, seemingly motiveless slayings across the country."[168] The *Chicago Tribune* reported that ammunition such as that used in the killings was readily available around the country.[169] The relatives of the alleged gang members sought the protection of civil rights leaders after they received anonymous threats.[170] In the wake of reports that traced the group's origin to black troops in Vietnam, Pentagon officials launched an investigation into possible De Mau Mau activity in the military.[171]

A month after the arrests, a De Mau Mau founder explained that, although it was a Black Nationalist organization, the group rejected violent tactics and "the image of the up-tight 'supermale' that many Black men cling to."[172] However, the group's official beliefs hardly mattered. The press and the public had rushed to judgment because the story of the murders fit perfectly with stereotypes that characterized African-American Vietnam veterans as embittered

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[166] Thomas Powers and Richard Phillips, "Police Seek to Link Gang to Murders in Nebraska," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 1972, 2.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Barbara Dehm, "Mau Mau Link Sought To Nationwide Killings," *Washington Post*, 17 October 1972, A3.

[169] "Foreign Ammo Easily Bought," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 1972, 3.

[170] Tony Griggs, "Parents of 2 Mau Mau suspects threatened," *Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), 21 October 1972, 1.

[171] "Pentagon Finds De Mau Mau Link," *New York Times*, 19 October 1972, 13.

[172] Pamala Haynes, "An Exclusive Interview With De Mau Mau Leader," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 18 November 1972, 1-2.

and violent. Federal efforts to respond to such concerns had failed to alter widespread perceptions.

Nor did many black vets feel that military service provided the rewards they had hoped for. On October 9, 1972, just a few days before the arrests in Chicago, Vietnam veteran Willie B. Phillips set himself on fire in the middle of a college homecoming parade. Leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, where Phillips worked as an organizer, compared his death to those of Buddhist monks in South Vietnam who performed self-immolations to protest the war. As he doused himself in gasoline, Phillips muttered, "Tell those white folks to quit treating us black folks so bad."[173] In 1968, the *Chicago Defender* had cautioned officials planning employment programs for African-American veterans: "The transition will not be eased by employment alone. There are functions that transcend mere bread and butter, essential as they are to life. Freedom, human dignity, freedom of choice, freedom of residence are all attributes of a truly free society."[174] Efforts on behalf of Vietnam veterans had not led to these freedoms. Project Transition and the Urban League were successful in securing jobs for veterans and created a rhetoric of masculinity and equality, but African-American vets believed that they still lacked real equality of opportunity. Moreover, as the reaction to the De Mau Mau group illustrates, they did little to eradicate white anxieties. Federal assistance aimed at African-American veterans thus satisfied no one.

However, Project Transition is important as an early example of federal policymakers' efforts to use veterans assistance to defuse a perceived threat with origins in the Vietnam War.

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[173] "Black Leaders…Compare fire death, monks," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 9 October 1972, 4.

[174] "Black Veterans," *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), 19 February 1968, 13.

Officials who had initially sought to encourage what they viewed as masculine behavior in African-American men became alarmed when returning soldiers, using the "masculine" courage and determination cultivated in battle, sought to deploy these qualities in their struggle for equal rights at home. Project Transition and similar initiatives were designed less for the benefit of African-American veterans than to quiet press coverage that insisted that black vets were dangerous. Black vets, who had hoped that their military service would help them secure equality, were allowed to claim more of the prerogatives of citizenship only because of widespread fears that they had become "ghetto guerillas."

Chapter 3: Defining the Vietnam Syndrome

In April 1971, two years after he was awarded the nation's highest military decoration, Sergeant Dwight Johnson was shot and killed while attempting to rob a grocery store less than a mile from his Detroit home. After he received the Congressional Medal of Honor in November 1968, Johnson's friends and family recalled, his future seemed extraordinarily promising. He got married, bought a house, attended President Richard Nixon's inauguration, and embarked on a public relations tour for the Army. But Johnson seemed overwhelmed by the attention and quickly found himself in financial trouble, despite job offers from companies across Michigan. Stomach pains prompted him to check into a military hospital, where a psychiatric evaluation found that he suffered from "depression caused by post-Vietnam adjustment problem." Subsequent consultations and hospital stays did little to solve Johnson's problems; he fell behind on his mortgage payments and complained that he felt exploited by the military's efforts to use his story to induce other young African-American men to enlist. After Johnson was killed, his mother speculated: "Sometimes I wonder if [he] tired of this life and needed someone else to pull the trigger."[1] A professor of psychiatry who read a *New York Times* account of Johnson's story explained in a letter that Johnson's problems were common among Vietnam veterans, who often experienced "feelings of apathy and estrangement, demoralization by unemployment, a sense of

[1] Jon Nordheimer, "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero," *New York Times*, 26 May 1971, 1, 16.

being exploited by the Army even while hospitalized." All were symptoms of the "post-Vietnam syndrome."[2]

In the early 1970s, the term "Vietnam syndrome" referred to the readjustment problems often confronted by veterans, difficulties that commanded the attention of many observers. Pundits suggested that vets had been ignored by a nation that hoped to forget the war. Ironically, the regularity of articles denouncing a public indifferent to vets' plight belied the claim that Americans had forgotten the war and its veterans. Stories with headlines such as "The Veterans—Aliens in Their Land," "The Vietnam Veteran: Silent, Perplexed, Unnoticed," and "Invisible Army" were media staples in the early 1970s.[3] This focus on individual, alienated veterans reflected a growing popular interest in psychology that influenced perceptions of vets. Analyses of the difficulties facing Vietnam veterans tended to ignore economic and social changes that contributed to vets' readjustment difficulties. Veterans of the two world wars had suffered "shell shock" and "combat fatigue," but Americans in the seventies were especially concerned with the psychology of Vietnam veterans. Notions of "wounded masculinity," initially a concern of professional psychological research, gained currency in popular culture in the 1960s and 70s.[4] The concept provided much of the vocabulary utilized in speculation about the possible damage caused by the war to vets' masculinity. This attention to mental health

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[2] Henry L. Rosett, "The Post-Vietnam Syndrome," *New York Times*, 12 June 1971, 28.

[3] Haynes Johnson, "The Veterans—Aliens in Their Land," *Washington Post*, 27 January 1971, A1; B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "The Vietnam Veteran: Silent, Perplexed, Unnoticed," *New York Times*, 8 November 1970, 1; Tony Jones, "The Invisible Army," *Harper's Magazine*, 245: 1467 (August 1972), 10-18.

[4] Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 220.

issues among vets, coupled with lobbying by veterans organizations, spurred the formal identification and definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 1980.[5]

While "PTSD" became the preferred term for readjustment and mental health issues associated with veterans, the meanings of the "Vietnam syndrome" expanded to encompass a range of political concerns about the impact of the war on the nation as a whole. Pundits and policymakers complained that the war had destroyed public trust in government, created deep partisan divisions, and fostered resistance to the projection of American power overseas. For much of the 1970s, such definitions of the Vietnam syndrome coexisted with uses of the term specific to veterans. These multiple layers of meaning encouraged the conflation of veterans politics and controversies over the war itself.

Because of this overlap, debates over federal assistance to veterans held a special significance for policymakers in the 1970s. Overtures to vets reflected the focus on returning servicemen as troubled individuals. Federal officials built on correlations drawn in the press between vets' image and the perceived need to provide assistance to retuning servicemen. Project Transition had used job training programs both to prevent discontent among African-American veterans and to control their image, but programs created in the 1970s moved more firmly into the realm of symbolism. Richard Nixon collaborated with conservative veterans to undermine the credibility of the progressive Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) and thus to maintain public support for his continued prosecution of the conflict. After the war ended, President Gerald Ford often refused to engage in veterans politics, a decision that

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[5] Wilbur J. Scott provides a detailed analysis of the politics of PTSD. See Scott, *Vietnam Veterans Since the War*. For more on the psychology of PTSD and its historical precedents, see Eric T. Dean, Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994).

infuriated many Vietnam vets. The Carter administration officials eager to end the Vietnam syndrome created programs that ignored debates over the substance of veterans benefits and focused instead on challenging the notion that Vietnam veterans faced unique problems. As the meanings of the Vietnam syndrome expanded, so too did veterans politics.

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An explanation of the Vietnam syndrome first appeared in a major newspaper in 1971. A chaplain, Major David Hoh, was credited with coining the term to describe the issues facing combat vets. Afflicted veterans often said they were bored by civilian life or military duties stateside and expressed a desire to return to Vietnam. This boredom, officers theorized, led Vietnam vets to behave in unpredictable and sometimes violent ways.[6] A year later a psychologist at New York University attempted to define the syndrome. Veterans often felt alienated, doubted "their continued ability to love others," and experienced guilt related to having witnessed the deaths of both friends and enemies. They felt victimized, most often by the VA system. Rage "follow[ed] naturally from the awareness of being duped and manipulated." Finally, "combat brutalization" that encouraged dehumanizing the enemy; their hatred was "then generalized to any Oriental, and eventually to any civilian, the more so when the G.I.'s learn how expendable they are themselves."[7]

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[6] Ralph Blumenthal, "'Syndrome' Found In Returned G.I.'s," *New York Times*, 7 June 1971, 7.

[7] Shatan, "Post-Vietnam Syndrome."

Accounts in the press seemed to confirm that many vets experienced severe readjustment difficulties and possible mental health issues. Vietnam veterans, a writer for *U.S. News and World Report* announced in 1971, regarded themselves as "nonheroes" because of the guilt they felt over their involvement in the "loneliest war in American history." Veterans were "forgotten Americans" who demanded "no flags or brass bands" but were disappointed by a lack of benefits and a "kind of inhospitable chill among fellow citizens." During testimony before a Senate subcommittee investigating the status of Vietnam vets, Harvard psychiatrist Gerald Caplan noted that many Americans were afraid of returning servicemen. Though that fear had inspired Project Transition, Caplan argued that it prevented the creation off veterans assistance programs. "I have the impression that this fear sometimes leads to a defensive denial that the veterans have significant problems in readjusting to living back home," he said, "and this contributes to a lack of public initiative in providing services to help them deal with the transition, which in turn exacerbates their situation and increases their resentful hostility."[8]

Caplan's argument, like many interpretations of vets' difficulties in the 1970s, identified individual veterans with "significant problems" as the cause of the problem rather than questioning the public's reactions to veterans. Yet there seemed to be little justification for fears of veterans; a *Newsweek* article pointed out that "lawmen have not thus far traced any particular criminal bent to the Viet vet." Nonetheless, the author noted: "A particular bit of folklore about the Vietnam veteran, particularly since the My Lai killings, is that he is coming home

[8] "Why Vietnam Veterans Feel Like Forgotten Men," *U.S. News and World Report*, 29 March 1971, 42-44.

brutalized—that the Indochina experience has turned him into a dehumanized 'gook-hater' at best and a 'latent killer' at worst."[9]

In an essay on the "Invisible Army," Tony Jones, an editor at *Harper's* magazine and a consultant to the Veterans World Project, also invoked fears of veterans as a potentially threatening force of angry young men. Jones recalled concerns about ex-servicemen who had participated in My Lai and about radicalized African-American veterans. In the summer of 1971, the Veterans World Project, a group of about 60 veterans at Southern Illinois University, compiled a 125-page report titled "Wasted Men." The project, based on interviews conducted with and questionnaires completed by 700 veterans, reached numerous dispiriting conclusions. First, the report diagnosed a "Vietnam-veteran syndrome" (PVS) that it claimed was far more severe than the readjustment problems encountered by veterans of other wars. Second, the nation's economic woes were severely hindering vets' efforts to find employment, and those who chose to attend college had trouble stretching their GI Bill funds to cover the costs. Moreover, there was "an appalling lack of vigorous or imaginative national leadership dealing with the veterans' situation." Jones warned: "Throughout "Wasted Men" there are hints of the anger that exists among veterans…If the immense energies of several million veterans are denied productive outlet or engagement, then we must be prepared to accept the consequences." Men returning from Vietnam had "brought the war back home. It exists in their heads and in their lives, and we as a society cannot long avoid dealing with that fact."[10]

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[9] "The Vietnam Vet: 'No One Gives a Damn," *Newsweek*, 29 March 1971, 27-30.

[10] Tony Jones, "The Invisible Army," *Harper's Magazine*, 245: 1467 (August 1972), 10-18. See also Christopher S. Wren, "The Woes of Coming Home," *New York Times*, 1 April 1973, 234.

Many journalists in the early 1970s, however, approached the issue from a very different angle. In these assessments, vets were objects of pity, young men damaged by the war and neglected upon their return. Accompanying more than one account was a stock photo that featured an evocative photograph of a lone veteran, head down, trudging past a banner that read: "Welcome Home Soldier. U.S.A. is proud of you."[11] In these accounts, veterans suffered from "depression, social alienation, anger and resentment, emotional irritability, poor control over aggression, alcoholism, and drug addiction." Their numerous problems were "exacerbated by the reception they receive[d] at home." These difficulties, according to an editorial in the *New Republic*, could be counteracted through vigorous government intervention and an economic upturn that would solve their unemployment woes.[12] Veterans did suffer from PVS, a condition "related to the shattering experience of war itself, with the added ingredient that this war, unlike others, does not give many of the men who wage it feelings of patriotism, or even purpose." However, vets with PVS "did not go berserk or totally withdraw. Instead they are bewildered, disillusioned, unable to cope."[13]

Accounts of veterans' homecomings frequently claimed that they simply "slipped back quietly into society" because they felt that no one would understand or sympathize with their experiences overseas. Nearly all such stories observed that, for Vietnam vets, there were "no

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[11] See, for example, Jon Nordheimer, "Postwar Shock Besets Veterans of Vietnam," *New York Times*, 28 August 1972, 1.

[12] "Home From the War," *The New Republic*, 30 January 1971, 11.

[13] Nordheimer, "Postwar Shock Besets Veterans of Vietnam."

victory parades, no brass bands, no cheering crowds."[14] *Washington Post* columnist David Broder argued: "While they were out in Vietnam fighting, those of us at home began to change our minds about the cause to which they had been committed." Upon their return, therefore, vets "found themselves, too often, treated not as men who had made an extraordinary sacrifice for their country, but as chumps who had been suckered into playing a game the rest of us smart guys had figured out was rigged."[15] According to writer B. Drummond Ayres: "The Vietnam veteran thinks twice before he tries to strike up a conversation with a pretty girl. He believes she would prefer young men with long hair and mod clothes. Instead, more often than not, he will take a seat next to another serviceman who, he feels, will 'understand.'"[16] Veteran Charles Langley believed that Americans were "losing a whole generation of people by not dealing with the problems of vets…These people, they're falling away."[17]

Veterans' "invisibility," reporters posited, was due partly to their resistance to joining veterans organizations. In 1972, a survey found that only 19 percent of Vietnam vets had joined such groups. Vietnam vets often claimed that they felt unwelcome in organizations like the VFW and the American Legion, whose members, they said, were unwelcoming and unsympathetic. However, the American Legion was trying to reshape its image in order to attract Vietnam vets. "Rock music plays in Legion halls that once knew nothing more avant

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[14] B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "The Vietnam Veteran: Silent, Perplexed, Unnoticed," *New York Times*, 8 November 1970, 1.

[15] David S. Broder, "Vietnam Vets: An Unpopular War Rubs Off," *Washington Post*, 13 February 1973, A12.

[16] Ayres, "The Vietnam Veteran: Silent, Perplexed, Unnoticed."

[17] Andrew Barnes, "Vietnam Veterans Speak Out: Losing a Whole Generation," *Washington Post*, 30 May 1972, C5.

garde than the polka," according to a *Wall Street Journal* article. "Legion officials personally visit the battlefield…The Legion is muffling its hawkishness, its conservatism, and is considering relaxing its membership standards."[18] Moreover, Vietnam veterans themselves formed numerous politically effective organizations. One of the best-known groups, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, not only lobbied for an end to the war, but also pursued an ambitious agenda of political and social changes. In the organization's newsletter, VVAW leaders explained: "In the process of understanding the struggles of vets, a debate began in the organization. Should we build a fighting veterans group or should we be some up-in-the-sky organization that would take up every struggle in some half-assed way and not work around veterans issues." The VVAW decided to "build the vets movement."[19]

The image of damaged vets became so pervasive that even joyful homecomings were not enough to obviate speculation on possible problems. Colin Leinster, author of a *Life* magazine profile of veteran Mike Ball, suggested that Ball was simply unaware of his own problems. In August 1970, Ball returned to his hometown of Midland, Michigan after a year in Vietnam. His family and a "crowd of friends" met him at the airport. At his parents' house, he and his recently returned brother-in-law were greeted by a banner that said "Welcome Home Soldier Boys." Shortly after Ball's arrival, a party began "gathering under the trees in the front yard on Maple Street, with food spread out in the new kitchen and the neighbors and relatives all dropping in." Ball decided that he would never live over fifteen miles from Midland. He explained: "I used to want to go to California and travel. Now I don't because anywhere else I'd be a nobody, because

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[18] P.F. Kluges, "Bygone Battles," *Wall Street Journal,* 19 May 1971, 1.

[19] "Editorial: Vets Fight To Unite," *The Veteran* 5:6 (October 1975).

nobody knows I was in Nam. Here I know lots of people and they know me. I'm a somebody." Though Ball believed that his Vietnam service conferred a special status, and he was delighted by the welcome he received, a *Life* reporter framed his story in terms of damage. Ball recalled that he had gone to Vietnam because he wanted to prove to his father that he was a "man." Back at home, he joined the VFW branch to which his father belonged. Tensions with his father continued, however, because Ball failed to secure a job, even though employers had promised to try to help because he was a vet. He enrolled in a community college, but he was uninterested in his classes and disdainful of his fellow students. The profile concluded: "Mike Ball does not seem to be aware of the limbo he is in. He has all that he dreamed of in the field, yet Vietnam somehow left him without the potential for making new plans or having new dreams."[20]

Even vets who were taking advantage of the benefits offered did not escape the "invisible" label. By 1971, according to *Newsweek*, nearly a million former servicemen had participated in education programs offered by the GI Bill, and the number of vets taking advantage of these benefits was steadily increasing. However, the *Newsweek* reporter insisted that "antagonism between ex-soldiers and students may well be unavoidable. For despite their frequently expressed feelings of deep revulsion at the war, many veterans—perhaps most of them—remain an essentially conservative minority." Moreover, veterans' own explanations for their distance from tradition undergraduates—"maturity" and "self-confidence" due to their age and military service—apparently rang hollow. Instead, the reporter suggested, it was a defensive response to the "cool reception" they found on campus. Ultimately, these veterans, too, were invisible: "Unlike the monumental waves of discharged GI's who so marked the character of the

[20] Colin Leinster, "A veteran comes home—to limbo," *Life*, 16 April 1971, 28-38.

nation's colleges after World War II and the Korean War, today's veterans seem resolved to fade passively into the campus woodwork."[21]

A former infantryman claimed that stereotypes about Vietnam veterans resulted from their status as public symbols, and thus varied depending on the status of the debate about veterans. William G. Pelfrey denounced both the ongoing domestic debate about the Vietnam War and the conflict itself. In a 1970 essay in the *New Republic*, Pelfrey condemned the war as a product of "the self-righteous nationalism that has historically, almost cyclically, been manipulated from arrogant tranquility into blind, violent crusades." He saved his harshest words, however, for the young antiwar protesters who had created "bitterness and division" throughout the nation. Many of the activists had never faced the draft or thought seriously about the meanings of service in Vietnam. Yet both they and their hawkish opponents continuously invoked the troops in dueling slogans: "Stop the war and bring our boys home" versus "Support out boys all the way and let them seize Victory." "In the fury of all the rhetoric," Pelfrey lamented, "the GI has been reduced to little more than an abstract, paternalistic figure of speech. America, we are not your *boys*." Pelfrey asserted that he, and other young men like him, had gone to Vietnam because they envisioned themselves as the "Crisis Managers and Cold Warriors of the 1970s and '80s." But veterans had abandoned that hope after their return home because of what appeared to be a "conscious desire to ignore our new presence in domestic society, a reluctance to be personally faced with a living image of the ghastliness. Everyone at this point only wants to get out of the mess and forget it." Pelfrey said that vets, too, wanted to forget, "yet there will always be some stigma, positive or negative, at having been a physical part of it."

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[21] "A Long Way From Vietnam," *Newsweek*, 4 October 1971, 50, 55.

Even as Americans called the men in Southeast Asia "our boys." Pelfrey believed: "Some may codify us with the self-righteous cavalryman butchering helpless Indian squaws; the once-unknown village Mylai is already as famous as the once-unknown country Vietnam. Perhaps in 30 years the popular image of the Vietnam GI will be one of an unthinking subhuman machine blindly submitting to the state."[22]

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One of the reasons for the "invisibility" of Vietnam veterans was that they did not enter the workforce in large numbers or as an immediately identifiable group. Former infantryman Robert Sanchez tried to find a job as a mechanic, but was unable to do so, even after asking at numerous gas stations in his area. He then began to apply for any job he could find, but discovered "no one wanted me—no dishwashers, no bus boys, no baker's helpers—nothing." Sanchez was "damn mad" about his inability to find a job, which seemed to him unjust in light of his service to his country. "For four years, my job was killing for the red, white, and blue, and I reckon I done my part," he said, "but if I tell that to anybody here they just laugh at me….I forget about trying to get a job or go to school." Even worse than the lack of jobs, though, was Sanchez's sense that "no one gives a damn." Sanchez was interviewed in a *Newsweek* article that argued that the provision for jobs for Vietnam veterans ought to be a key component of a national struggle to prevent the disappearance of veterans. However, the author claimed, vets' joblessness could largely be attributed to their own deficiencies and circumstances. Vietnam

[22] William G. Pelfrey, "Face Down: Climax to the Hardship Tour," *New Republic*, 18 July 1970, 13-14.

veterans were, on the whole, young and unskilled; they compared unfavorably with the "World War II man who already had his niche and came back and settled into it."[23]

This suggestion that veterans had brought unemployment on themselves ignored the economic realities of the U.S. in the 1970s. The economy was in a state of decline, with inflation rates climbing rapidly, thanks to Lyndon Johnson's efforts to fund both the war in Vietnam and the Great Society and the botched efforts of his successors to restore prosperity. Moreover, job growth in traditionally blue-collar occupations stagnated, and companies began to replace skilled workers with computers. Throughout the decade, real discretionary income for workers declined, even as inflation persisted.[24]

The unavailability of industrial and manufacturing jobs hit Vietnam vets especially hard. Most soldiers in Vietnam were from working-class families, and many had little education or occupational training when they joined the military. Some learned new skills while in the military, but those skills qualified them for rapidly vanishing blue-collar jobs.[25] In 1971, the *New York Times* reported that the overall unemployment rate for men under 24 was 10 percent, but for vets under 24, it was 14 percent. For ex-servicemen between the ages of 24 and 29, the rate was 10 percent, while 8.4 percent of non-veterans were unemployed.[26] Yet not all veterans were taking advantage of benefits that might have helped them secure jobs. As of 1969, only 20

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[23] "The Vietnam Vet: 'No One Gives a Damn," *Newsweek*, 29 March 1971, 27-30.

[24] William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 445-450.

[25] "Who Needs Riflemen?" *Newsweek*, 31 August 1970, 61.

[26] B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "Job Outlook is Bleak for Vietnam Veterans," *New York* Times, 5 June 1971, 1, 14.

percent of Vietnam veterans were using GI Bill benefits to attend colleges and technical schools. After World War II, 50 percent of returning servicemen claimed education benefits, and 42 percent did so after the Korean War. Some observers suggested that veterans were unable to use the benefits because the stipends provided by the 1966 bill were not large enough to pay tuition and living expenses. Others noted that U.S. troops in Vietnam were less educated than their counterparts in previous wars, and thus less inclined to pursue opportunities for further schooling. Still others posited that a lack of enrollment in education programs simply indicated "apathy" among veterans.[27] Two years later, the situation had changed very little. In 1971, according to *U.S. News and World Report*, "relatively few" vets were enrolled in available job training programs, and only 23 percent were utilizing the educational benefits to which they were entitled. The author asserted, furthermore, that with the passage of recent legislation, the benefits available to Vietnam veterans exceeded those created in the 1944 GI Bill. The VA had embarked on a vigorous campaign to ensure that former servicemen were aware of the available benefits.[28]

Veterans complained that employers were unwilling to consider their military service when making hiring decisions. Air Force veteran James Smith hoped that his training as a jet mechanic would enable him to secure a job with a commercial airline. However, potential

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[27] "Return to Apathy," *Time*, 22 August 1969, 50.

[28] "Bigger Benefits For Veterans But No Rush Of Takers," *U.S. News and World Report*, 1 February 1971, 48-49. It is nearly impossible to say whether the claim that Vietnam veterans benefits exceeded those granted World War II veterans is true. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, veterans organizations used what they called the generous terms of the 1944 GI Bill to bolster their claims that the benefits available to Vietnam vets were inadequate. Policymakers, on the other hand, routinely asserted that Vietnam-era benefits surpassed all previous assistance packages. Both sides manipulated figures regarding changes in the cost of living and in college tuition rates to support their arguments.

employers refused to recognize his military training and told him that he could be considered for a position as an apprentice only after two years of school.[29] Another vet observed: "I learned how to weld in Vietnam, but nobody back here thinks I know enough about it."[30] Moreover, vets did not receive special consideration in hiring decisions. According to a decorated Marine lieutenant: "Most employers just don't give a damn how many Purple Hearts you've won or how well you can lead men."[31] John McDonough spent sixteen years in the Marines, where he trained as a radio operator. He, too, found that "the market [was] surfeited" and his status as a veteran didn't "mean anything."[32]

Though veterans and pundits often suggested that a lack of federal assistance exacerbated vets' unemployment problems, federal official were far from indifferent to their difficulties. L. J. Andolsek, the head of the U.S. Civil Service Commission, explained in 1968 that the federal government was obligated to help Vietnam veterans find employment. He acknowledged that, while in the military, many vets had "learned little that will be useful to them in civilian life… While 'sharpshooter' may look good on a military record, it is no help at all on an application blank." Moreover, Androlsek claimed that "after every war in its history, the United States of America had made an effort to assist those who served in its armed forces…I believe our present program for extending job opportunities to veterans, especially to those who need help most, is

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[29] Ernestine Forrest, "Viet Veterans Scout for Jobs but Find Few," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November 1970, D1.

[30] B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "Job Outlook is Bleak for Vietnam Veterans," *New York* Times, 5 June 1971, 1, 14.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Leonard Sloane, "Uphill Battle For Veterans," *New York Times*, 14 May 1972, F3.

in keeping with the proudest of our traditions." Veterans benefits were "earned through honorable service to their country." Andolsek declared: "We simply can't afford to permit our first-class fighting men to return home and become second-class citizens." Benefits were not a "soft touch," they were an opportunity to "catch up, get even, get ahead, and enjoy the American heritage of self-reliance." Though federal assistance, according to Andolsek, was granted to all veterans because of the citizenship status conferred by military service, Vietnam veterans were owed even more then other returning servicemen. "We should remember that the Vietnam era veteran is unique in that he is largely unsung," Andolsek said. Unlike soldiers in World War II, "many leave home unnoticed by all save their families and friends, and come home unheralded. 'The big thing you discover when you get back home, said a much-decorated officer recently, 'is that damn few people even knew you were away.'"[33]

Moreover, veterans themselves did not always agree that they had been ignored or mistreated. According to a 1972 poll commissioned by the VA, 79 percent of veterans believed that "most people at home respect you for having served your country in the armed forces." Indeed, 75 percent found the VA benefits available to them "adequate," though half thought the VA should offer more advice on what benefits were available. 94 percent of non-veteran respondents to the same poll agreed that "veterans today deserve the same warm reception given to returning servicemen of earlier wars." However, only 55 percent said that "the American people are doing all they can to help veterans feel at home." Louis Harris, the director of the

[33] Commissioner, L. J. Andolsek, "Home and Hoping…The Vietnam Era Veteran," *Civil Service Journal*, April-June 1968.

poll, suggested that the disparity was the result of "deeply seated guilt about the way veterans of this war are being treated."[34]

In 1970, President Richard Nixon launched the Jobs for Veterans program, one of the Nixon administration's most significant efforts on behalf of veterans, which aimed to persuade employers that former servicemen were entitled to jobs, even in an extraordinarily tight labor market, as compensation for their military service. In a letter to the leaders of the 500 largest American corporations, Nixon asked that veterans be given preference in hiring. He argued that former servicemen "deserve[d] jobs" and had "valiantly earned" the opportunity to find "meaningful and productive" work in civilian life.[35] An advertisement for the Jobs for Veterans Program opened with Nixon's assertion that vets "deserve every opportunity that a grateful nation can provide."[36] The president reiterated that veterans were entitled to jobs in a statement prepared for a Jobs for Veterans luncheon in Detroit, Michigan. He praised the "tremendous progress the State of Michigan is making in promoting available employment for those brave fellow citizens who so valiantly defended our heritage and served the cause of peace." He concluded: "Nothing could be more basic to our goals as a nation than the determination to see

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[34] "Poll of Vietnam Veterans Finds Doubt Over Adjustment Aid," *New York Times*, 6 January 1972, 10.

[35] Letter from Richard M. Nixon to Robert J. Keith, 1 July 1971, Folder EX VA 7 7/1/71 (cont.) [1 of 4], Box 12, White House Central File, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[36] Memo from John F. Evans, Jr., to Ken Cole, 8 January 1971, Folder EX VA 7 Employment Assistance 1/1/71-6/30/71, Box 11, White House Central File, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

that all veterans find in their civilian careers the satisfaction and self-fulfillment they so rightfully deserve."[37]

The Jobs for Veterans program was premised on the assumption that veterans unemployment problems could be solved by changing perceptions of vets and reestablishing associations between manhood and military service. The initiative, which was administered by the Department of Labor, required virtually no financial outlay. Instead, the program highlighted the ways in which military service instilled qualities desirable in an employee, including discipline, self-confidence, and leadership abilities.[38] This administration aimed to "avoid the further association of social and transitional problems (such as drug addiction) with veterans since this association has proven harmful to many of them in securing employment."[39] A Chicago businessman, Jack Kemper, affiliated with the Jobs for Veterans project paid for an advertisement in *Business Week* that argued in favor of hiring former addicts. Men once addicted to drugs, Kemper argued, were stronger than most men, as evidenced by their ability to escape their addictions.[40] VA administrator Don Johnson argued that veterans were the "cream of America's young manhood," and thus exceptional employees.[41]

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[37] Statement: Richard M. Nixon to Attendees at Jobs for Veterans Luncheon in Detroit, MI, 16 July 1971, Folder EX VA 7 7/2/71-8/30/71, Box 12, White House Central File, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[38] Jobs for Veterans brochure, Folder EX VA 7 Employment [1 of 4], Box 11, White House Central Files, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[39] Memo from Caspar Weinberger to the President, 27 March 1973, Folder EX VA 1/1/73-[8/9/74] [1 of 3] [1/1/73-7/30/73], Box 2, White House Central Files, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[40] "Vietnam isn't over…" *Business Week*, 25 September 1971.

[41] "High Caliber of Vietnam Veterans," *Kansas City Star*, 23 August 1971.

The initiative met with some success as the White House's framing of veterans issues was reproduced in the press. An editorial in the *Detroit Free Press* noted that "unemployment among Vietnam veterans [was] only part of the distressing Michigan job picture." However, jobless vets were especially worrisome, because it was "particularly unfortunate that young men who have done dangerous and often onerous duty should suffer enforced idleness."[42] The *Kansas City Star* encouraged local businesses to participate in the program. "These deserving young men need a break," a 1971 editorial declared, "and if employers in the area co-operate they can move into civilian life without a greater loss of time, money, and dignity."[43]

However, the Nixon administration approached proposals for veterans programs that required financial rather than rhetorical commitments with a great deal of caution. In his first year in office, under pressure to increase funding for assistance programs, and concerned about the budget, Nixon requested a list of recent presidential vetoes of veterans' bills. His handwritten note on the list—"2 FDR; 5 HST!!; 1 DDE"—demonstrated his eagerness to learn whether he could veto legislation without endangering his political standing and his excitement when he learned that President Harry Truman had rejected five veterans bills.[44]

Armed with this knowledge, Nixon went on to oppose most substantive veterans programs, including a host of efforts to expand educational, vocational, medical, and burial benefits for Vietnam-era veterans. Beginning in 1969, groups such as the National Association of Collegiate Veterans (NACV) joined forces with the press to lobby for an increase in the

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[42] "We Owe the Vets a Chance," *Detroit Free Press*, 14 July 1971.

[43] "Follow-Through for Veterans," *Kansas City Star*, 26 August 1971.

[44] Memo from Arthur F. Burns to the President, 24 November 1969, Folder EX VA, 10/28/69-12/31/69, Box 1, White House Central Files, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

stipends provided to vets enrolled in college. However, it was not until 1974, two years after the *New York Times* ran an editorial denouncing the stipends as a "niggardly handout compared to the full funding of college studies which made the post-World War II G.I. Bill so significant a landmark," that the Comprehensive Vietnam Era Veterans Education Benefit Act was introduced in the Senate.[45] In 1972, Nixon pocket-vetoed a bill that would have augmented the budget for veterans' medical services by $113 million.[46] In the same year, the administration attempted to reduce compensation to disabled vets by $160 million. The White House finally agreed to support a funding package for VA medical care in the interest of maintaining good relations with Congress.[47]

The administration focused its attention on symbolic gestures rather than financial support for veterans. In 1969, Nixon established the President's Committee on the Vietnam Veteran, which was intended to assess the services provided to returning soldiers. Nixon, echoing sentiments expressed in the popular press, asserted that Vietnam veterans differed from men who had served in earlier wars and declared his commitment to ensuring that new programs were designed with the special interests of Vietnam veterans in mind.[48] However, the White House ignored the committee's recommendations.[49] The administration wondered in 1971 if

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[45] "Miserly Reward…" *New York Times*, 13 April 1972, 42.

[46] Nicosia, *Home To War*, 290-305

[47] Memo from Chuck Colson to Caspar Weinberger, 17 August 1972, Folder: Veterans—G.I. Bill Benefits, VA Medical Care, Box 119—Subject Files, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Charles W. Colson, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[48] Richard M. Nixon, "Statement on Benefits for Vietnam Veterans," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1969, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1970), 439.

[49] Memo from Richard P. Nathan to Ken Cole, 6 November 1970, Folder EX VA 11/1/70-12/31/70, Box 1, White House Central File, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

Nixon could demonstrate his commitment to vets and affirm their heroism by naming Navy ships after Vietnam veterans.[50]

Perhaps Nixon's most sustained effort to control vets' image was his ongoing support for Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, a conservative veterans organization. Indeed, the White House carefully guided the establishment of Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace (VVJP). The group was intended to counter the liberal VVAW.[51] Members of the VVAW were often closely allied with the New Left and sought to advance a progressive social and cultural agenda. The president found the VVAW's antiwar stance especially alarming. The VVAW, led by combat veteran John Forbes Kerry, had a strong base of support, and the administration feared that the group would succeed in turning public opinion against Nixon's strategy in Vietnam. The president hoped to achieve "peace with honor" through "Vietnamization," a policy that entailed gradually withdrawing American forces as South Vietnamese troops prepared to fight without military assistance from the U.S.[52]

Nixon backed VVJP because he hoped that the organization would provide him with a base of support for his foreign policy agenda. A year before the group was established, the administration had begun to consider the possibility of organizing veterans to speak out on behalf

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[50] Memo from Chuck Colson to General Hughes, 8 June 1971, Folder: Vietnam—Miscellaneous, Box 122, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Charles W. Colson, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[51] Memo from Charles Colson to Dwight Chapin, 15 June 1971, Folder EX VA, 1/1/71-6/30/71, Box 1, White House Central Files, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[52] Memo from Lesley Arsht to Chuck Colson, 18 June 1971, Folder: Vietnam—Miscellaneous, Box 122, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Charles W. Colson, Nixon Presidential Materials. For more on Nixon's strategy to end the war, see Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 232-299.

of the "silent majority" of Americans who, Nixon maintained, supported his objectives in Vietnam.[53] To John R. O'Neill, the group's leader, Nixon wrote: "Your willingness to speak out so eloquently and convincingly in support of our policies in Vietnam means a great deal to me, but more importantly to our servicemen throughout the world. Their sacrifices in the cause of freedom should never be forgotten."[54]

The White House carefully selected O'Neill based on his appearance and demeanor, which evoked the heroic masculinity attributed to American troops early in the war. White House Special Counsel Chuck Colson commended O'Neill to Nixon as "a very attractive dedicated young man—short hair, very square, very patriotic, very articulate."[55] These characteristics highlighted contrasts between O'Neill and long-haired VVAW leader John Kerry, who served in O'Neill's unit in Vietnam. Members of the VVAW explicitly questioned traditional images of military masculinity and promoted the notion of the "New Soldier," a veteran who embraced the values and goals of the men's liberation movement.[56] O'Neill proved an effective choice, as the differences between the two men were not lost on members of the press. In a column for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, writer Smith Hempstone compared the two men. He portrayed Kerry as an eloquent artistocrat "with the polish which goes with being the son of a diplomat-turned-lawyer" and "fashionably long (but not freaky) hair." O'Neill was

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[53] Letter from Edward F. McGinnis to George Bell, Jr., 23 June 1970, Folder: GEN VA [3/1/70-6/30/70] [5 of 6], Box 2, White House Central Files, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[54] Letter from Richard Nixon to John O'Neill, 27 July 1971, Folder EX VA, 7/1/71-12/31/71, Box 1, White House Central Files, Subject File, VA, Nixon Presidential Materials.

[55] "Recommended Telephone Call to John R. O'Neill," 16 June 1971.

[56] See Manning, *No More John Waynes*.

well-spoken, but also came from Texas, "where the Social Register is one of the slimmer volumes on the shelf." Hempstone sardonically concluded: O'Neill "is not about to throw his medals in the trash and he keeps saying absurd things about being 'proud' of his service and 'believing in America.' All of which stigmatizes O'Neill as a dreadful square."[57]

The members of VVJP enthusiastically embraced their mission of rallying the "silent majority" to Nixon's cause. Soon after the organization was established, O'Neill appeared on the CBS television program "Face the Nation." During the show, O'Neill accused the VVAW of exaggerated claims regarding the frequency with which war crimes occurred in Vietnam. "They present aberrations as general policy," O'Neill argued.[58] Bruce N. Kessler, a member of the organization, wrote an essay for the *New York Times* in which he attacked the VVAW and declared that antiwar veterans were a small minority. "I am sure the overwhelming majority of Vietnam veterans and Americans bitterly resent the charge from the left that they are all war criminals," Kessler said. He continued: "A young person in America today is pressured to surrender his mind and reason to new left demands and excesses….It is not easy to be an independent, rational young person with such generational medicine men peddling their patented potions for class solidarity against the 'meanies' and 'oldies.'"[59]

The organization eagerly participated in Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign, during which they declared that antiwar Democratic candidate George McGovern's troop withdrawal plan, if executed, would constitute a "war crime in the highest degree." Nonetheless, VVJP

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[57] Smith Hempstone, "Two Veterans: A Study in Contrasts," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 June 1971.

[58] "2 Vets Assail Reports of Viet 'Butchery,'" *Washington Post*, 7 June 1971, A9.

[59] Bruce N. Kessler, "Veterans for Vietnam," *New York Times*, 13 May 1971, 45.

claimed bipartisanship, noting that they were interested only in securing Nixon's reelection and would not support candidates at lower levels.[60] Following Nixon's lead, VVJP leaders denounced all antiwar protesters. In April 1973, the group called a press conference to demand a Congressional investigation of activists who had visited Hanoi during the war, including Jane Fonda, Tom Hayden, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsay Clark, and the singer Joan Baez.[61]

The organization was fairly successful in attracting public attention and complicating the claims made by the VVAW. Immediately after its founding, the group claimed 5,000 members. These numbers bolster O'Neill's claim VVJP spoke for most Vietnam veterans. Kerry, by contrast, represented only "himself and his embittered little group of 1,000."[62] Two years later, representatives of Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace said the organization had increased to 20,000 "loosely affiliated" members.[63] The conservative *Chicago Tribune* published two editorials in support of the initiative within six weeks of its creation. It was simple for the VVAW to attract attention with antiwar theatrics, but "it is much harder for a serviceman to attract attention, let alone become a hero, by speaking up in support of the administration policy…There is every indication that the new group does indeed represent a majority of returning veterans."[64]

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[60] Tim O'Brien, "Vietnam Veterans Start Nixon Drive," *Washington Post*, 29 July 1972, A5.

[61] "Ex-GIs Blast Fonda, Baez on Viet Role," *Washington Post,* 7 April 1973, B6.

[62] Ken W. Clawson, "'Veterans for a Just Peace' Formed to Offset Kerry Unit," *Washington Post*, 2 June 1971, A3.

[63] "Ex-GIs Blast Fonda, Baez on Viet Role."

[64] "The Veterans Find a New Voice," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 June 1971, 8. See also Daniel John Sobieski, "Viet Nam, Like It Is," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 June 1971, 12.

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President Gerald Ford's first public appearance as president was at a VFW convention on August 19, 1974. In his speech, Ford attempted to close the gap between Vietnam veterans and those who served in earlier wars. He reminded his audience that he, too, was a veteran, and declared: "I want good relations with all veterans….It is about time that we stop thinking of veterans in terms of different wars….I salute the men of many campaigns—of World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam."[65] Ford's inclusive message provoked criticism from Vietnam vets who resented the president's alleged failure to recognize their unique circumstances. They feared that Ford's message signaled an unwillingness to offer special assistance to Vietnam vets. A former non-commissioned officer sent Ford his medals in a protest against what he perceived as the administration's mistreatment of Vietnam vets.[66] In fact, Ford left most of the Nixon administration's policies intact, including the Jobs for Veterans Program, but the rhetoric Ford deployed in speaking about veterans issues demonstrated the power of media narratives that positioned Vietnam veterans as exceptional.

Ford quickly changed course. During a Veterans Day ceremony just two months after his speech at the VFW convention, he announced: "It has been said that the forgotten men of the Vietnam conflict are those who served….I intend to see to it that the silent heroes, the more than

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[65] "Address by the President to the 75th Convetion of the Veterans of Foreign Wars," 19 August 1974, Folder: SP 3-2 Veterans of Foreign Wars 75th Convention, Chicago, IL, 8/19/74 Executive," Box 40, White House Central Files, Subject File, Ford Library.

[66] Letter from Jeffrey Adkins to Gerald Ford, 30 October 1974, Folder: Veterans Affairs, Box 28, Public Liaison Office, Theodore C. Marrs Files, 1974-76, Ford Library.

six and one half million Americans who served their country in the Vietnam era with quiet courage, are not forgotten." Ford vowed to establish a "special interagency task force" charged with assessing the special needs of Vietnam veterans, and proposed a program tasked with "recruiting and hiring into the Government at least 70,000 Vietnam era veterans during fiscal year 1975."[67]

Despite these promises, Ford quickly developed a reputation among Vietnam veterans as an "anti-vet" president.[68] Veterans resentful of Ford's initial resistance to Vietnam era veterans politics were often mistrustful of Ford's decisions. In the fall of 1974, the administration opposed the expansion of veterans programs because they feared that increased benefits would be inflationary. Officials argued that a worsening economy would have a deleterious effect on veterans' job prospects. Numerous members of Congress, however, urged Ford to sign the legislation. They warned: "Thousands of veterans have contacted us to express their frustration and anger over the delay which has held up enactment to date. Understandably, their attitudes have begun to show cynicism and disgust with the manner in which the Federal government has treated a program so essential for their readjustment to civilian life."[69] Ford refused to risk his economic plan in order to satisfy veterans.

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[67] "Remarks of the President on Veterans Day, Arlington National Cemetery, 28 October 1974, Box 24, Folder: HO 57 Veterans' Day 8/9/74-10/31/74 Executive, Box 24, White House Central File, Subject File, Ford Library.

[68] Thomas C. Walker, "President vs. Veterans," *VFW Magazine*, December 1975, 10.

[69] Letter from Senators George McGovern, Bob Dole, et al to the President, 10 October 1974, Folder VA 3 Educational Program 8/9/74-10/22/74 Executive, Box 2, White House Central File, Subject File, Ford Library.

Ford was simply not attuned to issues that mattered to veterans. In 1975, the National Alliance of Businessmen, which worked with the Jobs for Veterans program to encourage employers to hire vets, aired a television advertisement that exhorted business owners "help America work—by pledging jobs for the disadvantaged, Vietnam veterans, and ex-offenders." Vietnam veterans denounced the ad, which they said would destroy their employment prospects by linking them with ex-offenders, encouraging media narratives about violent veterans. The White House, however, did not realize there was a problem until Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt wrote to the president to request that the administration ask the National Alliance of Businessmen to stop airing the ad.[70] As Ford's staffers began to plan his 1976 reelection campaign, they worried that his relationship with veterans had deteriorated so badly that it could cost him the presidency.[71]

As Ford had done, Jimmy Carter began his presidency by offering a message of unity that offended Vietnam veterans. Carter believed that Americans were "sick at heart" and desperate for "new leadership that could heal [them]" in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate.[72] The day after he took office, Carter pardoned Vietnam-era draft evaders in an attempt to smooth over one of the divisions caused by the conflict. Though he also offered new programs intended to assist unemployed veterans, the pardon struck many as a slight to Vietnam vets. In a letter written before Carter's announcement, Senators Sam Nunn and Henry M. Jackson advised Carter to

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[70] Letter from John Paul Hammerschmidt to the President, 1 August 1975, Folder: VA 7 Employment Assistance 2/1/75-1/20/77 Executive, Box 4, White House Central File, Subject File, Ford Library.

[71] Memo from Terry O'Donnell to Jerry Jones, 2 January 1976, Folder: VA Veterans Affairs 1/1/76-5/31/76 Executive, Box 1, White House Central File,, Subject File, Ford Library.

[72] Quoted in Schulman, *The Seventies*, 121.

couple the pardon with an extensive benefits package or risk alienating active duty personnel and vets who would be "upset and disillusioned" by Carter's announcement.[73]

A contentious relationship soon developed between vets and the Carter administration. The White House implemented several new and very successful employment programs for vets. According to Ray Marshall, Carter's Secretary of Labor, the programs had reduced the unemployment rate for Vietnam veterans from 7.4 percent to 5.7 percent, a rate 1.4 percent lower than that for non-veteran men.[74] This was the first time since the war began that unemployment figures for veterans were lower than those for other men in the same age brackets. Yet, to the consternation of administration staffers, veterans continued to request additional benefits. An internal White House memo complained: "Because we have refused to support costly new programs that would help the VEV's [Vietnam Era Veterans], VEV groups have accused the President of turning his back on the very Veterans he promised to help during his campaign."[75]

The Carter administration responded by embracing a veterans politics focused on image while shifting its focus away from the employment programs that had failed to win the approval of vets. In a report on the findings of a 1978 Presidential Review Memorandum order to investigate the veterans' status, Stu Eizenstat, Carter's chief domestic policy advisor, noted: "Vietnam-era veterans, as a class, are doing quite well and have readjusted successfully." Vets

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[73] Letter from Sam Nunn and Henry M. Jackson to the President, 21 January 1977, Folder: VA 1/20/77-6/30/77, Box VA-1, White Hose Central File, Subject File, VA, Carter Library.

[74] Letter from Ray Marshall to Philip L. Geyelin, 9 March 1978, Folder: VA 2/14/78-3/20/78, Box VA-3, White Hose Central File, Subject File, VA, Carter Library.

[75] Memo from Bill Spring and Ellen Goldstein to Jerry Rafshoon [n.d.], Folder: Vietnam-Era Veteran's PRM [Presidential Reorganization Memoranda]—1978 [CF, O/A 616 [1], Box 21, Staff Offices, Speechwriters, Fallows, Carter Library.

who encountered difficulties readjusting to civilian life likely only needed better information about the programs available to them. The report concluded: "The public's poor perception of VEV's needs to be improved, but it is a most difficult problem to define and attack."[76] The panel suggested that a study of attitudes toward vets might be in order before embarking on any major initiatives aimed at changing vets' image.

In the interest of curing the Vietnam syndrome, Carter made a number of decisions that played cleverly on the concerns about imagery at the heart of veterans politics. In 1977, he appointed Max Cleland to lead the VA; Cleland was the first Vietnam veteran to do so. The VA did not become a Cabinet-level department until 1989, but Cleland was invited to participate in Cabinet meetings. The White House hoped that this gesture of respect for Vietnam veterans would show Carter's commitment to resolving their concerns and set an example of the changed attitudes toward former servicemen that Carter aimed to encourage.[77] In 1979, Carter led the nation in a celebration of Vietnam Veterans Week, an event that recognized the "nation's moral debt to Vietnam era veterans."[78] Max Cleland reminded participants in the festivities: "The government alone is not able to address the problems facing Vietnam era veterans—the lack of full respect and honor for their service and sacrifice to their country…. They deserve our full

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[76] Memo from Stu Eizenstat to the President, 31 July 1978, Folder VA 6/21/78-9/11/78, Box VA-3, WHCF, Subject File, VA, Carter Library.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Cover letter from Jimmy Carter in sample Vietnam Veterans Week packet, March 1979, Folder HO/Vietnam Veterans Week 1/20/77-4/30/79, Box HO-5, WHCF, Subject File, HO, Carter Library.

understanding, support, and thanks as a Nation."[79] The Carter administration thus constructed the foundation for Reagan's symbolic veterans politics.

[79] "Statement on Vietnam Veterans Week by Max Cleland, [n.d.], Folder HO/Vietnam Veterans Week 1/20/77-4/30/79, Box HO-5, WHCF, Subject File, HO, Carter Library.

Chapter 4: Surely Vietnam Veterans Were Men

On January 21, 1981, minutes after Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the nation's president, 52 Americans who had been held hostage in Iran for fourteen months were freed by their captors. Reagan viewed their release as an auspicious beginning to the "era of national renewal" that he had promised in his inaugural address.[1] The hostages had dominated the news for the final year of Carter's presidency. His failed attempts to secure their release had seemed to many Americans to symbolize the nation's impotence in world affairs in the wake of Vietnam. The hostages' captivity recalled that of American prisoners of war in Hanoi, while the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran paralleled the takeover of the one in Saigon.[2] Indeed, the crisis was partly responsible for Reagan's 1980 election victory, as voters opted for the candidate who promised an aggressive foreign policy unaffected by the "Vietnam syndrome."[3] Upon their return to the United States, the former hostages were greeted with a ticker-tape parade and showered with gifts, including lifetime tickets to all major-league baseball games.

These events prompted Vietnam veterans to reflect again on their own homecomings. A former serviceman suggested the celebratory mood was a "catharsis for the lousy era this country has had since the beginning of the Vietnam War…maybe [we] are finally getting our heroes'

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[1] Troy, *Morning in America*, 58.

[2] Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 152.

[3] David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter With Radical Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 179-180. Melani McAlister argues that the crisis helped shape American national identity and offers a fascinating analysis of the gendered aspects of the narrative; see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 198-234.

welcome vicariously through the former hostages."[4] Another summed up the feelings of many veterans: "none of us really had the audacity to expect we might get free baseball tickets when we got back. But at least you could have noticed that we went."[5] One organization viewed the hostages' release as an opportunity to remind Americans of vets' ongoing problems. In an advertisement plaintively headlined "Help Us," the Vietnam Veterans of America asked readers of the *New York Times* to "welcome home" Vietnam vets. (See Figure 1.)[6]

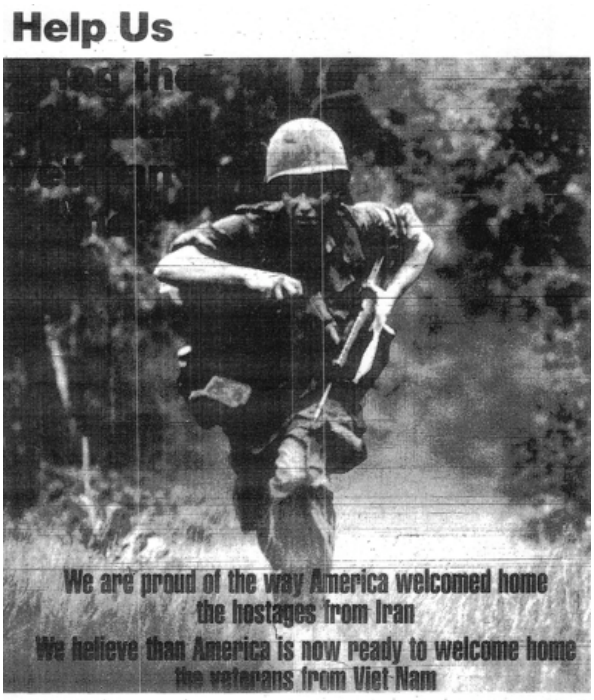

Figure 1

[4] Brian K. Sherwood, "Time to Remember Our Vietnam Heroes," *New York* Times, 3 February 1981, A18.

[5] Jan Scruggs and Joel L. Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 56.

[6] Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, Inc., "Help Us," *New York Times*, 24 May 1981, E19.

A group in Indianapolis staged a demonstration to remind Americans that many Vietnam vets "were still mental and physical hostages of their duty overseas."[7] Angry vets dismissed the celebrations as "just a bunch of stuff" or a "slap in the face," though they tempered such comments with assurances that they believed the hostages deserved the accolades.[8] However, one vet warned that media reports on the homecoming could provoke violent reactions. Meanwhile, counselors at vet centers noted an increase in calls that coincided with the hostages' return and suggested that the festivities had triggered bouts with PTSD.[9]

Despite these complaints early in his presidency, Reagan secured the loyalty of many Vietnam vets. On the campaign trail, Reagan won over vets through his insistence that American efforts to halt the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia and been heroic and necessary and his promises to ensure American military superiority in the Cold War. Once in office, Reagan employed similar rhetoric as he sought reverse the damage allegedly done by the Vietnam syndrome.[10] Reagan's aggressive political rhetoric and endorsement of a massive arms buildup were extensions of the masculine public persona he cultivated.[11] Political scientist John Orman has argued that Reagan was the "most adept President since Franklin D. Roosevelt at manipulating political symbols" and the "quintessential macho president."[12] Susan Jeffords

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[7] "Vietnam Veterans Parade in Shadow of 52 Hostages," *New York Times*, 1 February 1981, 22.

[8] John Burgess and Eugene Robinson, "Overflowing Joy on Ex-Hostages' Return Not Shared by All Americans," *Washington Post*, 28 January 1981, A9; "Vietnam Veterans Parade in Shadow of 52 Hostages," *New York Times*, 1 February 1981, 22.

[9] "Vietnam Veterans Parade in Shadow of 52 Hostages"; Burgess and Robinson, "Overflowing Joy…"

[10] Michael Schaller, *Reckoning With Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 120.

[11] Ibid., 126.

[12] John Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior: Carter, Reagan, and the Macho Presidential Style* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 18.

posits that, thanks to the masculine image Reagan projected, which contrasted sharply with Carter's presidential style, "the value of masculinity was reasserted in American culture in the 1980s."[13]

A conservative cohort of veterans who shared Reagan's views found a powerful ally in the president. With his assistance, they created the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program (VVLP), an organization that sought to remake the image of Vietnam vets. They argued that Americans had traditionally associated masculinity with military service and regarded veterans as specially entitled citizens deserving of unique provisions in public policy. The VVLP was a federally funded "leadership demonstration program" that recruited successful veterans to serve as role models for struggling vets and orchestrated a national public relations campaign on behalf of veterans.[14] Vets in the VVLP took responsibility for one another's success in a model intended to recreate the sense of masculine "brotherhood" generated by combat. However, program leaders were almost uniformly elite white men who had served as officers in Vietnam and had embarked on professional careers upon their return stateside. Their rhetoric of "brotherhood" notwithstanding, VVLP organizers showed little concern for the problems of vets who hoped to secure jobs in manufacturing and industry.

The notion that the "successful veteran offer[ed] an affirming picture of masculinity" was at the heart of VVLP efforts to reinforce the message that vets' masculinity was not subject to question.[15] The program aimed to foster a specific understanding of the meanings of masculinity

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[13] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 13. See also Jeffords, *Remasculinization of America.*

[14] Terry H. Martin, *An American Sunrise: The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program: A History of ACTION's Three-Year Veterans' Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: ACTION, 1984), 2.

[15] John Wheeler, "Vietnam Veterans' Gains," *New York Times*, 28 May 1984, 19.

and to link Vietnam vets to it. The program's structure allayed the concerns of veterans who feared that accepting federal "handouts" would undermine their manhood. Indeed, self-sufficiency and toughness defined the VVLP's version of a militarized masculinity. The VVLP affirmed the value of military service and encouraged young men to join the military.

Militarized masculinity was an important facet of the culture of the 1980s, though the reasons for this development have remained murky in most scholarly accounts.[16] By the middle of the decade, manhood was an important theme in popular books, films, and other cultural texts. *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, which promoted a highly aggressive, military masculinity, was launched in 1975. By 1986, it was selling a quarter of a million copies each month. The majority of its readers were Vietnam veterans.[17] The growing popularity of the magazine coincided with other cultural trends that celebrated the military, including the commercial success of Hasbro's G.I. Joe franchise.[18] Films featuring male action heroes reflected Reagan's public persona. The plot of *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* revolved around the symbolic defeat of the Vietnam syndrome. When John Rambo, a Vietnam vet, is asked to return to Vietnam to rescue American POWs allegedly still held by their Communist captors, he responds: "Do we get to win this time?"[19]

This chapter's examination of the VVLP and its relationship to the Reagan administration moves beyond analysis of cultural texts to show how concerns about masculinity shaped the realms of policy and political activism. The creation of the VVLP, which expanded upon the

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[16] A useful study is Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*.

[17] J. William Gibson, "Paramilitary Fantasy Culture and the Cosmogonic Mythology of Primeval Chaos and Order," *Vietnam Generation*, Nos. 3-4, (Summer-Fall 1989), 13.

[18] Troy, *Morning in America*, 241.

[19] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, passim. For a discussion of the *Rambo* films, see pp. 28-52.

goals of the Nixon-backed Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, marked the culmination of two decades of public debate that linked stereotypes of Vietnam vets with their need for special benefits and programs and reinforced the political and cultural changes that climaxed during Reagan's presidency. The VVLP's assertion of veterans' manhood mirrored Reagan's public persona and contributed to the imagery of aggressive masculinity common in the 1980s. Conservative Vietnam vets and their allies in the executive branch reinforced Reagan's agenda and the power of the state to shape understandings of gender. Moreover, administration officials consistently lent rhetorical and fiscal support to the VVLP, even as they limited other federal veterans programs, because they believed that remaking the image of Vietnam veterans would help eradicate the Vietnam syndrome from American political culture. The militarized masculinity promoted by the VVLP and the White House aligned with Reagan's foreign policy agenda.

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In a 1981 Rose Garden ceremony inaugurating the VVLP, President Reagan noted that, although the "vast majority of Vietnam veterans readjusted quickly" to civilian life, some had "found it difficult to come to grips with problems that can be traced to their wartime experiences."[20] The VVLP would play a critical role in undermining "the image of the Vietnam veterans portrayed as losers, fools, or dope addicts," as well as the "new mythology" of "veterans

[20] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Ceremony Commemorating the Initiation of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1982), 381.

as guilt-ridden victims, ashamed of their service."[21] This image adjustment would be facilitated by a network of "successful veterans" who served as role models for other vets and as mentors to those seeking employment.[22] In short, the program was based on the notion that Vietnam veterans, working together, could demonstrate their self-sufficiency to the public and thus improve their image.

One architect of the VVLP, Thomas Pauken, explained the origins of this idea during testimony before a House subcommittee. At a 1979 ceremony in honor of Vietnam vets, Pauken recalled, he "looked around the room and saw a tremendous number of…successful people in a variety of professions, in business, and in labor" and realized that those successful men might be able to assist other vets. That idea, Pauken insisted, summed up the VVLP. It was "basically the concept of trying to pull together Vietnam veterans who [were] leaders already to help some of their fellow veterans by volunteering in a variety of fashions to help make a difference in the lives of some people that need some assistance."[23] In 1981, President Reagan appointed Pauken as the director of ACTION, a federal umbrella agency for volunteer and service groups, a position that allowed Pauken to implement his vision of a volunteer organization for Vietnam vets. Under the auspices of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, which authorized ACTION's administrator to create special volunteer programs as needed, Pauken and a group of like-minded vets established the VVLP.

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[21] "The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program/ACTION: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Education, Training, and Employment of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, October 20, 1981" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 6.

[22] Martin, *An American Sunrise*, 2.

[23] "The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program/ACTION: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Education, Training, and Employment of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, October 20, 1981," 4.

The program's leadership might have served as a model for the cultivation of advantageous personal and business relationships at the heart of the VVLP's strategy. Tom Pauken received the ACTION appointment thanks to his work as a Republican "party loyalist." In the 1960s, he had chaired the College Young Republicans and participated in the production of a documentary that attacked New Left activist Tom Hayden, then went to Vietnam as a military intelligence agent. After two failed attempts at winning a Congressional seat in his home state of Texas, Pauken, who described himself as a member of the "old right," secured the job at ACTION.[24] John Wheeler, the program's first national director, was a graduate of West Point, Harvard Business School, and Yale Law School who served as a logistics officer at Long Binh during the war.[25] As assistant general counsel to the Securities and Exchange Commission, he was able to use his position to make contacts with other well-connected vets, including early VVLP supporter James H. Webb, a heavily decorated former Marine captain who had served in Vietnam after his graduation from the Naval Academy at Annapolis. After the war, Webb, forced to resign his commission due to a knee injury, became the assistant minority counsel on the House Veterans Affairs Committee and wrote a best-selling novel, *Fields of Fire*, about Vietnam.[26] In 1981, Webb took up a post as assistant secretary of defense after

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[24] Colman McCarthy, "Thomas Pauken's Penchant For Underestimating Action," *Washington Post*, 1 May 1983, L6.

[25] During the war, "Long Binh" referred to a major American logistics base northeast of Saigon.

[26] Webb had joined the Republican Party only after President Jimmy Carter offered amnesty to draft evaders in 1977; he would also serve in the Reagan administration as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs from 1984 to 1987, and as Secretary of the Navy in 1987. Biographical information on Wheeler, Webb, and Carhart comes from Rick Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line: The American Journey of West Point's Class of 1966* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), particularly pages 449-455. See also Christopher Buckley, "The Wall," *Esquire*, September 1985, 64-65.

withdrawing from consideration as Reagan's appointee to head the VA.[27] Thomas Carhart, whose term as the VVLP's national director followed Wheeler's, had been in Wheeler's class at West Point. Although the group's programs were open to all veterans, regardless of their race or social class, the vets who headed the organization were members of a social elite.

Indeed, VVLP officials often showed a certain disregard for the circumstances of the struggling veterans that the program was supposed to serve. In 1983, the Los Angeles chapter held a black-tie fundraising gala. The guest list included well-known figures from Hollywood and Washington, including Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Jimmy Stewart, Charlton Heston, and Suzanne Sommers, but fewer than a hundred out of the more than one thousand people present were Vietnam vets. As one veteran, who had received a complimentary ticket from the local VA office, complained, "Not too many of us can afford coming to a shindig like this when tickets go for $2,000 a table."[28] However, the leaders of the VVLP were convinced that vets from all social backgrounds shared their concerns. A reporter once asked, "If you went down to Fordyce, Arkansas, and to the gas station and there's some guy pumping it there who did his two or three years as a grunt, would he be talking this way? Would he be 'fractured,' traumatized, or whatever?" A VVLP ally answered that he didn't believe there were "any class boundaries when it comes to the kinds of suffering that [went] on."[29]

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[27] Pete Early, "Pentagon Nominee Gives Views on Women," *Washington Post*, 26 April 1981, A5. He withdrew from consideration for the VA job because of his concerns about budget cuts; see "Prospective V.A. Chief Withdraws Over Cutbacks," *New York Times*, 29 April 1981, A25.

[28] Joy Horowitz, "Vietnam Vets Support Group Stages a Benefit," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 November 1983, F1.

[29] "Voices of a Wounded Generation: A Symposium" in A.D. Horne, ed. *The Wounded Generation: America After Vietnam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 108-109.

Yet VVLP officers were, for the most part, leaders in the worlds of law, business, and politics, who counted among their "most gratifying successes" an article called "The Separate Peace of White-Collar Veterans" that appeared in a magazine aimed at business elites.[30] Bill Jayne, director of the VVLP's Washington office, acknowledged that it would be especially difficult for a vet to find a job if "he's been employed in one of the smokestack industries, which are declining." However, Jayne claimed that for most vets, the problem was one of "*under*employment rather than *un*employment." Another program director noted that it was "easy" for the program to assist "vets with skills in areas like computer programming, engineering, and aircraft mechanics," but admitted that the VVLP had had less success with vets seeking jobs that did not require such expertise.[31] Of course, it is likely that highly-skilled veterans could have secured jobs without VVLP assistance. Moreover, most men who served in Vietnam came from working-class backgrounds. Financial and social constraints prevented many of them from pursuing the education needed for jobs outside of the manufacturing and industrial sectors, and opportunities for vocational training in the military were often limited.[32]

The VVLP's emphasis on the notion of a "brotherhood" of Vietnam vets further elided class differences within the VVLP. Indeed, one of the basic premises of the program was that there was a "common bond" among veterans, which they posited was one reason that successful veterans could be more effective than impersonal government programs in assisting those

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[30] Martin, *An American Sunrise,* 60.

[31] Jube Shiver, Jr., "Outlook for Nation's Veterans Improving," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 1984, X40.

[32] For more on the role class played in the war, see Appy, *Working-Class War*.

readjusting to civilian life.[33] John Wheeler explained: "Vietnam veterans…were especially close-knit in Vietnam and shared a common emotional quarantine on our return to America." The VVLP was "a logistical support system to reawaken the sense of fellowship we shared in the war zone and channel it to solve specific problems in the present."[34] A participant in the Los Angeles VVLP affirmed that the notion of a special bond among vets was a key component of the program's success. He argued: "When vets do go to some of these counseling centers, they get a counselor who was never in 'Nam, he can't really understand because he never experienced it. And that's why a vet talking to another vet is the best way to go. I feel like we veterans are banding together like a brotherhood."[35]

The program's founders reinforced the importance of the VVLP's core principle of self-reliance by taking care to emphasize that the VVLP reflected the ideas about voluntarism and a reduction in the scale of government often voiced by Reagan.[36] A report noted: "ACTION has renewed its efforts to restore voluntarism and private initiative to American society….The VVLP was never intended to be a direct service delivery mechanism requiring a top-heavy bureaucracy."[37] Although the VVLP did have a national office with a paid staff, a network of 38 local offices, run almost entirely by volunteers, was the most important component of the

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[33] "The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program/ACTION: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Education, Training, and Employment of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, October 20, 1981," 3.

[34] John Wheeler, *Touched With Fire: The Future of The Vietnam Generation* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984), 52-53.

[35] David Wharton, "Viet 'Brothers': Vets Seek Help From Each Other," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1983, Metro 1.

[36] For more on Reagan's notions of voluntarism and small government, see Ehrman, *The Eighties* and Troy, *Morning in America*.

[37] Martin, *An American Sunrise*, 23-24

program.[38] Moreover, the VVLP was to receive federal funding for only three years and was slated to be financially self-sufficient by 1984. Existing federal programs, particularly those administered by the Veterans Administration, the Department of Labor, and the Small Business Administration, helped cut costs and eliminate the need for the creation of additional bureaucracy. The VVLP also held its own fundraising events.

Strategic considerations also shaped the program's structure. Efforts to distinguish the initiative from "welfare" programs associated with women and children reinforced the masculine image of participants.[39] VVLP leaders implied that other federal programs encouraged vets to rely excessively on their services. Such organizations thus helped perpetuate an image of veterans as damaged and no longer capable of leading independent and fulfilling lives. Pauken stressed that the VVLP was "not a program that [would] inadvertently increase the dependency of the veterans of the Vietnam War. Its entire emphasis is on generating a self-sufficient attitude."[40]

Because the VVLP was based on the notion that the image of vets could most effectively be improved by encouraging independence, the issue of unemployment among vets was high on the organization's agenda. Administrators sought to move beyond the provision of networking opportunities and to ensure that participants had access to job training and a national database of available positions. One arm of the program, a self-funding Small Business Development project, aimed to provide veterans with the capital and knowledge necessary to start their own

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[38] Ibid., 3. Roughly 6,000 volunteers worked with the program between 1981 and 1984.

[39] For more on the origins of federal entitlement programs and their gendered implications, see Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled* and Scokpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers.*

[40] "The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program/ACTION: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Education, Training, and Employment of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, October 20, 1981," 4.

businesses. The employment component of the VVLP was consistently framed in terms of its potential to demonstrate the ability of vets to act as leaders and sources of stability within their communities. Moreover, Pauken believed that negative perceptions of vets were among the chief reasons that many men had difficulty finding employment. He asserted that many people were reluctant to hire vets "because when an employer is confused and is affected by the stereotyping that is going on, and somebody comes to the employer and says, 'Look, I've got a Vietnam veteran who needs a job,' and the employer says, 'Oh, my gosh, we've got a dope addict or a killer or a psycho."[41] Image and employment were thus inextricably linked. However, jobs for veterans were not the ultimate goal of the program. Instead, employed vets supposedly improved the image of all vets by serving as symbols of veterans' independence and stability. In the VVLP's circular logic, this change in public perceptions would enable more vets to secure jobs as employers realized that vets were trustworthy and responsible.

The organization also argued that service in Vietnam had instilled qualities that would serve vets well in the masculine world of business. Two therapists who worked with the Veterans Administration, Joel Brende and Erwin Pearson, observed: "In American society, *maleness* is imbued with great respectability. Culture requires that a man be resourceful and productive to provide adequately for his family, and make important contributions to society."[42] In a book designed to assist vets and their families, Brende and Pearson posited that Vietnam veterans were conscious that many Americans believed that the inability of some vets to find employment and provide for families meant that veterans were not fulfilling their responsibilities as men. This "awareness is a source of great personal pain and lowered self-esteem," they claimed. "Chronic

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[24] Ibid., 18.

[42] Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Pearson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 59.

self-hate over perceived failures fosters an ever escalating sense of bitterness that many Vietnam veterans continue to struggle with."[43] VVLP programs were designed to address such concerns. The cover of the Indiana office's brochure depicted an M-16 rifle, the weapon carried by most American soldiers in Vietnam, turning into an attaché case. (See Figure 2.)

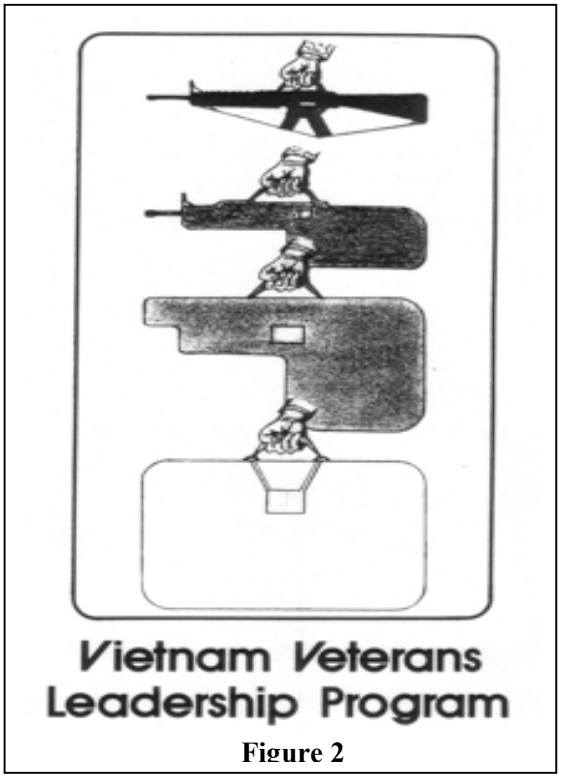

Figure 2

A member of the board of directors reinforced the idea that experiences in Vietnam naturally translated into attributes important to employers: "Vietnam Veterans learned the meaning of responsibility in Southeast Asia, and we are responsibly contributing to a better society because of our unique experience."[44] James Webb believed that these qualities would be evident to

[43] Ibid.

[44] Brochure for the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana, Folder 5, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records, Calumet Regional Archives, Indiana University Northwest, Gary, IN.

anyone who spoke with a vet. "Buy him the beer you owed him ten years ago," Webb suggested, "you'll find out he is by and large a class act, much tougher than his nonveteran peers, much more used to hassle and disappointment….And you may end up offering him a job, or at least another beer."[45]

Despite the importance of encouraging positive perceptions of vets in the minds of the VVLP's leaders, media coverage of the program often focused on the practical impact of its activities. *New York Times* articles on the VVLP offices in Connecticut and New Jersey, for example, centered on their role in improving employment opportunities and medical care for veterans.[46] Leo Thorsness, the chairman of the Los Angeles VVLP, declared: "all the (psychological) counseling in the world won't help you if you can't get a job….The job is what you really need to feel worthwhile."[47] However, comments from program representatives also emphasized the importance of the message that most Vietnam vets were strong and successful men. In a *Detroit News* article, for example, John Todd, the director of the VVLP office in Pontiac, Michigan, stressed that the program asked "the 90 percent of well-adjusted, successful Vietnam veterans to go into action for the few."[48]

Program officials carefully monitored and shaped much of the press coverage. The VVLP aimed to ensure that "positive media references significantly outnumber[ed] the negative," to encourage the "production of materials emphasizing positive values and experiences of Vietnam service" intended for a general readership, and to see to it that vets were

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[45] James Webb, "What the Vietnam Vet Needs," *Soldier of Fortune*, May 1980, 52-53.

[46] "Connecticut Journal," *New York Times*, 17 October 1982, CN3 and Sandra Gardner, "New Jerseyans," *New York Times*, 14 July 1985, NJ2.

[47] Wharton, "Viet 'Brothers."

[48] Leonard Yourist, "Vets to get help—from vets," *Detroit News*, 6 December 1983.

"perceived as the primary source of leadership and stability in the community."[49] In such articles, VVLP officials highlighted the masculinity of veterans. Ignacio Ramos, a volunteer at the program's Indiana office, told a reporter, "I still have the belief in my God, my country, myself as a man and my Marine corps." He asserted that service in the conflict fostered masculinity, recalling that battles in Vietnam were "fought by little boys who turned in their prom tuxedos for combat uniforms. They quickly became men."[50] A 1982 article in *U.S. News and World Report*, the "brainchild" of the VVLP office in San Antonio, which focused on the successes and personal and physical strength of veterans, was representative of articles that the VVLP encouraged.[51] Entitled "8 Vietnam Vets Who Came Out Winners," the piece profiled eight men who had served in Vietnam and emphasized that they had quickly readjusted to civilian life. Several of the veterans interviewed had earned advanced degrees, and one, who lost a leg in the war, had climbed Mount Rainier in order "to demonstrate the worth of injured veterans and other disabled persons. It would, he thought, help build confidence and self-esteem."[52] The article noted that while the ways in which concerns about employment and disabilities were addressed varied from one chapter to another, VVLP officials were uniformly "intent on blasting the stereotype of the Vietnam veteran as a person with deep emotional problems."[53]

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[49] Martin, *An American Sunrise*, Attachment No. 15, 5.

[50] John Zimmerman, "He spreads positive thinking," *The Times* (Hammond, IN), 30 May 1983, A1, A10.

[51] Letter from John Delavan Baines to Ron Layer, 11 June 1982, Folder 19, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records, Calumet Regional Archives, Indiana University Northwest, Gary, IN.

[52] Wendell S. Merick, "8 Vietnam Vets Who Came Out Winners," *U.S. News and World Report*, 29 March 1982, 46.

[53] Ibid., 45.

In addition, the group's members routinely scrutinized all references to vets in the media and were quick to object to perceived biases. In 1983, for example, the *Post-Tribune* of Gary, Indiana, ran a story about a man, identified as a Vietnam veteran, who "went berserk" after he was evicted from his apartment and fired his gun repeatedly at local police, forcing them to pump tear gas into the apartment. A police officer speculated that the incident was fueled by a combination of alcohol and epilepsy medication.[54] The next day, a follow-up story noted that the gunman was not actually a Vietnam vet and, in fact, had never been in the military.[55] A flurry of letters to the editor from members of the VVLP of Indiana ensued, and the chapter's executive director and board president promptly contacted the paper to request a meeting. The *Post-Tribune*'s ombudsman subsequently quoted both men at length and focused on their insistence that the public unfairly viewed vets as "baby killers," "dope fiends," and "time bombs waiting to explode." The meeting was a success by the VVLP's standards; the editorial closed with a reminder that "few veterans of that war are going to flip their corks….they'll expect us to treat them as human beings, not as sticks of dynamite waiting for the fuse to burst into flame."[56]

VVLP leaders also deployed more creative means of communicating their message. They aimed to shape the way the war was presented in classes at schools and universities, appeared on TV and radio shows throughout the country, produced a documentary about the program, and organized parades and other "recognition events" for veterans. Several of the group's founders also wrote books that centered on their concerns about the image of Vietnam

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[54] "Tear Gas Flushes Shooter," *Post-Tribune* (Gary, IN), 13 July 1983, A1, A4.

[55] Letter from Walter E. White to "Voice of the People," 26 July 1983, Folder 31, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

[56] Elmer Bernard, "Stop stereotyping the Vietnam vets," *Post-Tribune* (Gary, IN), 27 July 1983, B3.

vets.[57] In Houston, local chairman Richard K. Kolb conducted a study intended to undermine stereotypes about vets.[58] On July 4, 1983, at the urging of the Georgia VVLP, the Atlanta Braves dedicated a baseball game to Vietnam vets. Tom Pauken asked Reagan to tape a message to be played on the scoreboard before the game and broadcast on CNN. White House aides promptly agreed and drafted a speech that asked Georgia employers to work with the VVLP "to make sure that Vietnam veterans have a living memorial—a chance to put their discipline, loyalty, and experience to work in a worthwhile job."[59] The VVLP of Kentucky contracted with billboard advertising companies to erect red, white and blue signs that encouraged employers to hire veterans. (See Figure 3.) The national office later helped groups place similar signs throughout the country; the expanded campaign captured the attention of the *Wall Street Journal*.[60] These signs reinforced the notion that all vets shared qualities, presumably acquired in the military, which would prove useful in civilian jobs.

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[57] Martin, *An American Sunrise*, 58-64.

[58] John Zimmerman, "Study dispells [sic] myths about Vietnam vets," *Times* (Hammond, IN), 30 May 1983, A1.

[59] Memo from Tom Pauken to James Coyne, 3 June 1983 and "Presidential Taping: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, Monday, June 27, 1983" [draft dated 24 June 1983], both in "Taping: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program (Dolan) June 22, 1983" Folder, Box 096—Speech Drafts, Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, White House Office of Speechwriting Files, Reagan Library.

[60] Memorandum from William Jayne to VVLP Chairmen and Project Directors, 19 May 1983, Folder 25, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records. A reproduction of the ad was attached. The VVLP of Indiana purchased space for four ads in northwest Indiana. See also "Jobs for veterans…" *Wall Street Journal*, 10 July 1984, 1.

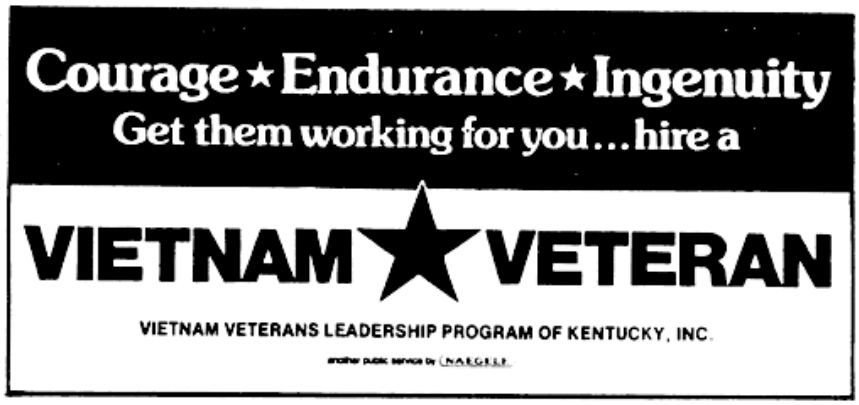

Figure 3

Don Grigg of the Arkansas VVLP endeavored to impress the importance of garnering publicity on vets who hoped to establish new chapters. He suggested a variety of approaches, including asking the state's governor for a proclamation, offering to speak at high schools and Lions' Club meetings, and volunteering at call-ins on local television stations. Despite his apparent enthusiasm for the program, however, Griggs was cynical about the motives of those who cooperated with his promotional efforts. He noted the efficacy of writing letters to the editor since "they'll publish anything," and observed that it was easy to enlist the aid of state and local politicians because "[e]veryone loves a Vietnam Vet around election time." However, Grigg closed with a reminder about the importance of maintaining an upbeat tone: "All you see on TV is how Vietnam Vets are fuck-ups. So if you go positive you'll have a lot of help."[61]

This public relations campaign was, in the estimation of most program officials, the most important component of their efforts. John Baines opened the San Antonio office with the aim of "pursuing job assistance, group therapy and upgrading the image of the Vietnam combat

[61] Letter from Don Grigg to Talmadge Foster, 13 January 1983, Folder 19, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

veteran." Six months later, he had "basically abandoned" all but the last of these objectives, in part because he believed that adequate programs addressing the first two were already in place.[62] John Szczepanski, executive director of the Indiana VVLP, declared that the VVLP was needed because "television programs have portrayed veterans with problems, but with the majority of veterans, that's not the case. It takes some adjustment, but we have put on the civilian pants and moved out."[63] A brochure explained that, in providing "leadership and assistance" to vets, the VVLP was "responding to the need for an improved public perception of the Vietnam Veteran."[64]

However, the organization did not simply seek to rehabilitate the image of individual vets; members meant to mitigate the political and cultural divide created by the war in Vietnam. A member of the Indiana VVLP's board of directors suggested that the VVLP offered an "opportunity to help in reaffirming the integrity of military service and restoring a national perception that military service is an honorable calling." Another believed that their work could lead to a "reconciliation of the division that wracked our country during the Vietnam War."[65]

The VVLP's arguments gained national prominence with a cover story that appeared in *Time* in June 1981. A national "embrace" of Vietnam veterans, writer Lance Morrow declared, "would mitigate an injustice and might even improve the nation's collective mental health. It would help to settle America's tedious mental quarrel with itself." Morrow suggested that

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[62] Letter from John Delavan Baines to Ron Layer, 11 June 1982, Folder 19, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

[63] Chuck Green, "New group helping Vietnam vets," *Star-Register* (Crown Point, IN), 26 May 1983, 1, 22.

[64] Brochure for the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana, Folder 5, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

[65] Ibid.

Americans had tried to forget the war in Vietnam, a "bizarre catastrophe [that] shattered so much in American life (pride in country, faith in government, the idea of manhood and the worth of the dollar, to begin the list) that even now the damage has not yet been properly assessed." Vietnam vets were "tangible evidence, the breathing testimony, that it had all been humiliatingly real. Whether walking straight or riding wheelchairs, whether prospering at their work or glaring out at the rest of the nation from a daze of rage and drugs and night sweats, they reminded America that the war had cost and that it had hurt." The public and policymakers had thus chosen to ignore these veterans. However, those who sought to mitigate the deleterious effects of the conflict on American society and political culture should begin by providing support to vets. Morrow argued that an expansion of veterans benefits and a concomitant public acknowledgment of veterans' sacrifices and affirmation of their heroism would enable the nation to move beyond the war.[66]

The connection Morrow made between tangible benefits and public perceptions of veterans resonated with many of his readers, especially ex-servicemen. Stuart Feldman, a founder of the advocacy group Council of Vietnam Veterans, pronounced it "excellent" and wrote to the White House to suggest that President Ronald Reagan demonstrate that he held vets in high esteem by holding a dinner for them at the White House. Feldman noted that Morrow's piece had elicited more responses from readers than any other essay in *Time*'s history.[67] Six

[66] Lance Morrow, "Bringing the Viet Nam Vets Home," *Time*, 1 June 1981, 40, 45.

[67] Letter from Stuart Feldman to Richard Darman, 17 September 1981, "Veterans [1 of 4]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject Files, Elizabeth Dole Files, Ronald Reagan Library. See also "Letters to the Editor," *Time*, 22 June 1981, 7, 10.

weeks later, the magazine followed up the "much acclaimed" essay with a cover story, also by Lance Morrow, on the difficult homecomings of Vietnam veterans.[68]

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The Reagan administration shared the conviction that vets' improved image would close the rifts in American political culture opened by the war in Vietnam. The conservatism and militarized masculinity endorsed by VVLP leaders made them natural allies of President Reagan, who successfully projected a similar image. In domestic politics, Reagan excoriated federal bureaucracy, including social welfare programs, and endorsed the manly independence promoted by the VVLP. The 1983 invasion of the island of Grenada highlighted Reagan's "cowboy" approach to foreign affairs. Administration officials believed that changed attitudes toward Vietnam veterans would alter many Americans' negative feelings about the conflict and their resulting reluctance to support aggressive foreign policies.

Reagan, master of what historian Gil Troy has called "a politics of postures and images," cultivated an appearance of robust masculinity.[69] "In Reagan's self-promoted image—chopping wood at his ranch, riding horses, standing tall at the presidential podium—his was [a] hard bod[y], a body not subject to disease, fatigue, or aging," as Susan Jeffords has noted. Reagan's "hard body" defined his presidency. The "depiction of the indefatigable, muscular, and invincible masculine body became the linchpin of the Reagan imaginary; this hardened male

[68] "A Letter From The Publisher," *Time*, 13 July 1981, 2.

[69] Troy, *Morning in America*, 14.

form became the emblem not only of the Reagan presidency but for its ideologies and economies as well."[70]

In 1980, Reagan built a presidential campaign on promises to reverse the "defeatism" that dominated the Carter years.[71] The race quickly took on a personal cast. Carter, according to some observers, lacked the masculine qualities required of a chief executive. As president, an essay in the *Wall Street Journal* claimed, he "lost no time revealing his true feminine spirit. He wouldn't twist arms. He didn't like to threaten or rebuke. He wore sweaters, and scrupulously avoided the trappings of power. He even kissed Brezhnev! And we watched how far this approach got him in the jungles of Washington and the world."[72] Reagan presented himself as the antidote to Carter's femininity. Historian Philip Jenkins has observed that Reagan promised to restore the nation's stature in world affairs and extolled "traditional manly values, such as standing up, standing tall, and fighting back." These values extended to domestic policy: "Debates over taxes and rights involved themes of masculinity…attacks on excessive taxation and the nanny state clearly deployed a rhetoric of autonomy, individualism and independence."[73]

The VVLP seized on this language, a strategy that helped them secure federal funding even as Reagan's budget called for dramatic cuts in social spending that included other veterans programs.[74] The VVLP drew directly on the notion of independence that characterized Reagan's

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[70] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 25.

[71] Troy, *Morning in America*, 24-49.

[72] John Mihalec, "Hair on the President's Chest," *Wall Street Journal*, 11 May 1984, 30. See also Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 10-11; Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 155.

[73] Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 20.

[74] For more on Reagan's budget, see John Ehrman, *The Eighties*, 49-89. See also Troy, *Morning in America*, 64-83 and Schulman, *The Seventies,* 229-241. Troy and Schulman posit that Reagan protected the entitlement programs important to middle-class taxpayers, including Social Security and veterans benefits.

approach to social policies. Moreover, the program's aim of eliminating the need for federal funding by 1984 exemplified Reagan's ideals. When Representative Sonny Montgomery of Georgia complained in 1982 that the administration was pressuring Congress to cut the VA's budget while funneling money to pet projects like the VVLP, the White House withdrew its request for funding, but noted that this was intended "to avoid *any appearance* of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program weakening other programs" and called the VVLP "exemplary."[75] The administration thus sought to avoid accusations of favoritism, though the VVLP clearly took precedence over other social programs. ACTION, the federal agency that provided the VVLP's funding, began as a part of President Kennedy's service initiatives and Johnson's Great Society.[76] The agency's chief commitments had long been to antipoverty programs operated by Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Under VVLP creator Thomas Pauken, however, VISTA's budget declined from $33 million in 1981 to $11.8 million in 1983, and Reagan aimed to cut the program altogether in 1984. Meanwhile, Pauken was offering funding to the VVLP in what one reporter termed "wild heaves of extravagance."[77] In 1983, an investigation by the General Accounting Office found that ACTION was likely "neglecting its antipoverty mandate"

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[75] The italics in the quote are mine. Letter from G.V. Montgomery to Elizabeth H. Dole, 4 August 1982 and Letter from Elizabeth H. Dole to G.V. Montgomery, 21 September 1982, both in "Veterans August to December 1982 [3 of 7]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

[76] Cass Peterson, "Men of Action Have Many Differences—and a Lot in Common," *Washington Post*, 27 January 1983, A21.

[77] Colman McCarthy, "Thomas Pauken's Penchant for Underestimating Action," *Washington Post*, 1 May 1983, L6.

in favor of VVLP programs.[78] Despite the criticism, Reagan continued to support the VVLP staunchly.

Reagan's lack of sympathy for the goals of most antipoverty and welfare programs is well-known; his enthusiasm for the VVLP's mission appears more significant in light of his uneven support for other veterans groups and programs. The administration and veterans groups had a brief honeymoon period. The VFW's 1980 support of his candidacy marked the first time that organization had ever endorsed a political candidate or formed a political action committee.[79] But by 1981, cuts in the VA budget had prompted the National Commander of the American Legion to convey to Reagan his fear that the administration aimed to "eliminate the entire VA health care system."[80] Though the administration publicly reassured vets that health care benefits were not endangered by proposed reductions in federal spending, White House officials privately dismissed veterans' concerns. When veterans staging a hunger strike at a VA hospital in California demanded federal funding for a study of the effects of Agent Orange and official recognition of PTSD as a service-connected disability, administration staffers characterized their demands as "absurd."[81] Publicly, however, the VA reassured vets that it had "been specifically directed by the White House to stop plans to implement any proposed

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[78] "Action agency head rejects GAO criticism," *Chicago Tribune*, 20 April 1983, 15. The GAO report also claimed that ACTION reports had exaggerated the job placement rate for vets in the program., though Pauken dismissed the findings as "nitpicking stuff."

[79] Letter from Cooper T. Holt to Elizabeth Dole, 17 February 1981, "Veterans [4 of 4]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

[80] Telegram from Michael J. Kogutek to the President, 25 March 1981, "Veterans [4 of 4]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

[81] Memo from Karna Small to James Baker, 26 May 1981, "Veterans [2 of 4]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

reductions in Veterans programs."[82] In the same month, Bobby Muller, the president of the liberal organization Vietnam Veterans of America, asked for a meeting with the Reagan and financial support for the successful Outreach Center program. White House officials dismissed the request, noting that Muller was impossible to satisfy and "rather thoroughly radicalized."[83]

Despite reservations about the veterans movement, the administration took care to maintain a rhetoric of support for former servicemen. In 1982, the president's scheduling office indicated that he would be unavailable to attend a Veterans Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. The announcement provoked a strongly-worded memo from Morton Blackwell of the Office of Public Liaison: "If the President does not make some strong statement honoring Vietnam veterans…we are going to have a big black eye not only with the veterans organizations…We will have a big black eye in the media."[84] Reagan also assuaged veterans' concerns that, as the recipients of federal largesse, they would be equated with the much-maligned "welfare queens." In a speech at a VFW convention, Reagan reassured the assembly: "I, for one, do not view veterans benefits as a social welfare program. No one is giving the veteran anything; these are benefits that have been earned."[85]

The rhetoric of manhood that surrounded Reagan's domestic programs was equally evident in his administration's foreign policy initiatives. Secretary of State Alexander Haig

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[82] Letter from Donald A. Custis to "Concerned Veterans," 28 May 1981, "Veterans [1 of 4]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject Files, Elizabeth Dole Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

[83] Memo from Morton C. Blackwell to Elizabeth H. Dole, 14 May 1981, "Veterans [3 of 4]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

[84] Memo from Morton C. Blackwell to Elizabeth H. Dole, "Veterans August-December 1982 [2 of 7]" Folder, "Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

[85] Draft of Presidential address to the VFW Convention, Los Angeles, California, on August 16, 1982 [draft dated 5 August 1982], "Veterans August-December 1982 [5 of 7]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

decried the apparent weakness of American "will" during Carter's presidency, when a United States "enfeebled by its malaise" had given allies cause for concern and enemies a reason to celebrate.[86] In 1981, Haig opined that U.S. intelligence services had undergone a "conscious castration" in the late 1970s.[87] Reagan's approach to world affairs resembled the macho heroics of action movie characters like John Rambo. After terrorists hijacked a TWA flight, Reagan remarked: "Boy, after seeing *Rambo* last night, I know what to do the next time this happens." He was joking, but his reaction was an accurate reflection of his notion of leadership.[88] Political cartoons often depicted Reagan dressed as a cowboy. (See Figure 4.)[89]

[86] Schulman, *The Seventies*, 221-222. For more on Reagan and the "New Cold War," see Schaller, *Reckoning With Reagan*, 119-147; Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 209-217; and Troy, *Morning in America*, 238-255.

[87] Bob Woodward, "Meetings' Notes Show the Unvarnished Haig," *Washington Post*, 19 February 1982, A1.

[88] Troy, *Morning in America*, 193, 241. For a detailed analysis of the correlations between action movie heroes and Reagan's presidential style, see Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 24-63. Jerry Lembcke offers an analysis of the relationship between such films and the veterans movement. See Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 144-182.

[89] Steve Mendelson, "Democracy Restored," *Washington Post*, 30 October 1983, C1.

Figure 4

However, Reagan feared that the Vietnam syndrome would continue to limit his strategies for national defense. In March 1981, Reagan's proposed intervention in a civil war in El Salvador provoked a public backlash. Some pundits believed that a military intervention would cure the Vietnam syndrome. Conservative columnist William Safire opined: "The anguish of American doves who cry 'another Vietnam!' is helpful—it makes the point that what Mr. Reagan calls the 'Vietnam syndrome' no longer paralyzes U.S. policy."[90] However, despite Reagan and Secretary of State Alexander Haig's repeated assurances that El Salvador would not be another Vietnam, they were unable to calm the uproar, which Reagan pointedly attributed to the Vietnam syndrome.[91] In the end, Congress capped the number of American advisors in El Salvador at one hundred and required regular progress reports from the administration.

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[90] William Safire, "The Savings of Salvador," *New York Times*, 26 February 1981, A19.

[91] "No 'Vietnam' in El Salvador, Reagan Promises," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1981, A1 and Don Oberdorfer, "Using El Salvador to Battle the Ghosts of Vietnam," *Washington Post*, 1 March 1981, C1, C5.

In a commencement address at West Point in May 1981, a frustrated Reagan declared the death of the Vietnam syndrome. It was a "temporary aberration," he said, that had created a national mood favorable to "more and more social experimentation." He declared: "Let friend and foe alike be made aware of the spirit that is once more sweeping across our land, because it means we will meet our responsibility to the free world. Very much a part of this new spirit is patriotism."[92] He continued: "The era of self-doubt is over." As *Washington Post* columnist Joseph Kraft observed, the administration's rhetoric was inconsistent at times. On the same day that Reagan spoke at West Point, Caspar Weinberger exhorted graduates of the Air Force Academy to be receptive to the change Reagan claimed had already occurred. Kraft explained: "The attitudes associated with Vietnam were not, like a plague, something foreign that came, went, and is now gone forever…. [T]he so-called 'Vietnam syndrome' was a logical response to a misbegotten war."[93]

Reagan renewed his efforts to end the Vietnam syndrome during the 1983 invasion of Grenada. The action in Grenada was prompted by the overthrow of a civilian government by a leftist military junta backed by Cuba. Six hundred American medical students studying on the island were caught up in the coup, and Reagan sent in a detachment of Marines after he received official requests for help from governments in the region. Vice President George H. W. Bush called Grenada a "proud moment," noting that when Reagan took office, the "legacies of Vietnam and Watergate still haunted our own conduct of foreign policy." He compared Reagan's leadership in Grenada to Carter's in Iran: "When the President faced this crisis in Grenada…he didn't wait until we were taken hostage, he acted before the crisis became a

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[92] George Skelton, "President Tells of Commitment to U.S. Security," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 May 1981, B1.

[93] Joseph Kraft, "Defense—With Two Voices," *Washington Post*, 31 May 1981, B7.

humiliation."[94] Columnists in the *Washington Post* argued that the invasion exemplified what feminist Betty Freidan called Reagan's "macho-cowboy diplomacy" and bemoaned the tendency of those in the White House to label those who disagreed with Reagan's policies as "sissies."[95] Public opinion polls underscored the macho appeal of the invasion. Sixty-two percent of men approved of Reagan's actions, while only 29 percent disapproved. However, though 41 percent of women approved, 43 percent believed that the U.S. should not have sent troops to Grenada.[96] A reporter for the *New York Times* argued that the invasion recalled John Wayne films and suggested that it was intended to "force the country to shed post-Vietnam restraints and assume a worldwide policeman's role."[97] A *Wall Street Journal* editorial exulted that Grenada had replaced the "lesson of Vietnam"—that the U.S. "should not ever rely on military power to achieve its political goals"—with the "lesson" that "it's once again known that the U.S. is *willing* to use its military as an instrument of policy."[98]

Reagan tied Grenada to Vietnam through the veterans of the two conflicts. Shortly after the invasion, Reagan gave a radio address in honor of Veterans' Day, in which he complimented the "recent heroes" for acting with "the same dedication and valor as their colleagues before

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[94] "Bush Calls Grenada 'Proud Moment' for U.S.," *New York Times*, 25 February 1984, 8.

[95] Judy Mann, "Invasion," *Washington Post*, 28 October 1983, C1; Mary McGrory, "Getting Us Ready for Nicaragua," *Washington Post*, 30 October 1983, C1-2.

[96] David Shribman, "Poll Shows Support for Presence of U.S. troops in Lebanon and Grenada," *New York Times*, 29 October 1983, 9.

[97] Hedrick Smith, "Men At War," *New York Times*, 30 October 1983, E1. Robert G. Kaiser was similarly critical in an essay in the *Washington Post*. See Robert G. Kaiser, "Is This a Foreign Policy or a Recipe for Disaster?" *Washington Post*, 30 October 1983, C1-2.

[98] "The Lesson of Grenada," *Wall Street Journal*, 28 October 1983, 30.

them."[99] Vietnam veterans, however, did not necessarily appreciate the comparison. One declared that Grenada was not a "real war" and resented the celebration of those who served in Grenada. "I never knew, until I read the press accounts of the heroes' welcome given the returning U.S. forces, how much *I* wanted to be called a hero….One of the curses of being a Vietnam veteran is that you are always in danger of becoming someone else's moral."[100]

Reagan's Veterans' Day message was part of a larger effort to connect attitudes toward Vietnam veterans, and the work of the VVLP in particular, to national security and the global position of the U.S. "During the last decade," he explained, "the military became the whipping-boy for those who were confused and uncertain about America's role in the world." He attributed resistance to his foreign policies to the Vietnam syndrome, characterizing the nuclear freeze movement as "just another lingering reaction to the Vietnam conflict, which left so many disillusioned with their own country."[101] In a meeting with VVLP leaders, Reagan emphasized that the "tragedy of Vietnam divided our Nation and damaged America's self-image." He asserted that a changing image of veterans would heal these wounds. Moreover, he noted that it was important for Americans to show their gratitude to Vietnam vets because "in a hostile world a nation's future is only as certain as the devotion of its defenders—and the nation must be as

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[99] Spencer Rich, "Reagan Pays Tribute to America's Veterans in Weekly Broadcast," *Washington Post*, 6 November 1983, A23.

[100] Alan Vanneman, "Using Grenada to Purge Vietnam," *Washington Post*, 1 January 1984, H5.

[101] Draft of Presidential address to the VFW Convention, Los Angeles, California, on August 16, 1982 [draft dated 5 August 1982], "Veterans August-December 1982 [5 of 7]" Folder, Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Reagan Library.

loyal to them as they are to the nation. This program is one way of expressing our commitment not only to Vietnam vets but to all those who now serve their country."[102]

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The VVLP's intervention in American political culture coincided with an important shift in the terms of debate regarding assistance for Vietnam vets. While earlier press commentary had suggested that readjustment programs for vets were necessary in order to counteract the aggressive masculinity of returning soldiers, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, journalists had begun to imply that the masculinity of Vietnam veterans had been damaged by their service. In an article entitled "What Vietnam Did to Us," a writer for *Newsweek* traced the careers of 54 men who served together in Vietnam between 1968 and 1969. One vet, Jerry Dickman, declared that veterans were "ordinary guys," but the article noted that Dickman suffered from an anxiety attacks and "hardly a man in Charlie Company came through the war and the journey home untouched."[103] A commanding officer remarked that the veterans "went away boys…and came back men." The article's next line, however, qualified this statement: "They came back marked men."[104] The tone of the article reflected much of the popular coverage of veterans' experiences in its emphasis on problems with drugs, alcohol, unemployment, and maintaining stable family

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[102] Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, November 10, 1981 [draft dated 9 November 1981], Folder 2 (10/28/81-12/31/81), Box 001, Series I: Presidential Meetings, Presidential Handwriting File, WHORM, Reagan Library.

[103] Peter Goldman et al, "What Vietnam Did To Us: Survivors of Charlie Company relive the war and the decade since," *Newsweek*, December 14, 1981, 48.

[104] Ibid., 97.

lives. In response, the VVLP sought to turn the discussion to the external factors that they believed influenced perceptions of vets.

Vets were haunted by a fear that the public had compared their manhood with that of World War II veterans and found it lacking. One VVLP member, for example, emphasized that Vietnam vets weren't "psychotic killers, living for their next shot of dope. There may not have been D-Days or Iwo Jima's in their war, but they are every bit proud, fighting men."[105] Moreover, Vietnam-era vets claimed that established veterans' groups, comprised primarily of World War II vets, often failed to assist men returning from Vietnam. Vietnam vets believed that members of groups like the American Legion were unsympathetic to their problems and "subtly conveyed that if the extraordinary level of American technology and military strength could not win a war with a third-rate military power, the problem was the men, not the machines."[106] Indeed, the VVLP model of vets helping vets stemmed in part from their conviction that older vets couldn't be relied upon for assistance. Don Grigg of the Arkansas chapter noted that the vets at his local VA office were "from the Old Guard…and very suspicious of Vietnam Veterans." He warned VVLP leaders not to expect support from the VFW, whose members he characterized as "a lot of drunks whose priorities are totally different with what the VVLP is all about. They are only interested in VA Hospital Care, Pensions and

[105] Zimmerman, "He spreads positive thinking," A1.

[106] Flower of the Dragon, Inc. "A Basic Manual for Developing Vietnam Veteran Employment Services by Community-Based Organizations," prepared for Veterans' Employment Service, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 1979 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 4.

war stories about when they drove Patton's car into a ditch." Grigg was similarly unimpressed by the American Legion, and simply observed: "Bar opens at ten in the AM."[107]

The VVLP likely underestimated the willingness of World War II veterans to offer support. Some were indeed reluctant and feared that their benefits would be reduced as budgets were stretched to accommodate the needs of Vietnam vets. During congressional debates about changes in the rules regarding federal hiring preferences for veterans, one "budget expert" pointed out that "any bucks going to Vietnam vets is money that doesn't go to the older vets—and it's the older vets who control the veterans organizations."[108] However, groups like the VFW and American Legion made a concerted effort to reach out to Vietnam vets. Such efforts, though uneven in the seventies, accelerated in the early 1980s. This turnaround was spurred in part by practical considerations. As the average age of their members increased, VFW and Legion leaders realized that new members were essential to the groups' long-term survival. However, they were also genuinely concerned by the problems of Vietnam vets. In 1982, for example, the VFW lent its considerable political clout to the campaign for government recognition of, and assistance with, health problems resulting from the use of Agent Orange. The organization did so despite VA administrator Robert P. Nimmo's taunts about the "preferential coddling" demanded by Vietnam vets.[109]

Moreover, in 1982, Arthur J. Fellwock, the Commander-in-Chief of the VFW, applauded the VVLP's efforts. His endorsement highlighted his admiration for the organization's promotion of self-sufficiency. "The nation's Vietnam veterans are a tremendous source of

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[107] Letter from Don Grigg to Talmadge Foster, 13 January 1983, Folder 19, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

[108] Alan L. Otten, "Congress and the Veterans Lobby," *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 July 1978, 12.

[109] "VFW Lines Up With Viet Vets on Agent Orange," *New York Times*, 15 November 1982, A1.

strength and leadership for our country," he wrote. "The concept of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program will tap into that source and put it to use for the betterment of the individual and the nation." Yet Fellwock's support of the VVLP did hint that older veterans found other Vietnam vets organizations excessively demanding. He declared: "I firmly believe that this positive, self-help approach has much greater potential than any other single program yet conceived to help the Vietnam veteran."[110]

Editorials and articles in the press generally supported increased benefits for Vietnam veterans, even at the expense of World War II vets, but their arguments often suggested that fighting in Vietnam damaged soldiers in ways that service in earlier wars had not. Criticizing a proposal to cut funding for federal programs for Vietnam vets while maintaining spending on programs for older vets, the *New York Times* argued that "significant psychological problems and difficulties at work" among Vietnam vets necessitated high levels of funding. World War II veterans, however, did not require the "President's safety net."[111] Another editorial called for "a modern version of the GI Bill," and cited a VA-funded study that claimed "60 percent of the veterans returned with physical and psychic scars."[112] The authors of a book on the psychological impact of combat in Vietnam were convinced that the war would dominate political and cultural life until Americans "faced what it did to the soldiers who fought there." They noted that, in fact, the large numbers of World War II veterans who had difficulty readjusting to civilian life had led the medical establishment to examine more closely the

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[110] Letter from Arthur J. Fellwock to Jerry Yates, 1 June 1982, Folder 7, Box 4, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[111] "Helping the Wrong Veterans," *New York Times*, 6 April 1981, A14.

[112] "Forgotten Veterans Remembered," *New York Times*, 13 October 1979, 18. The study cited was Arthur Egendorf, et al, *Legacies of Vietnam: Comparative Adjustment of Veterans and Their Peers* (New York: Center for Policy Research, 1981).

psychological impact of combat. However, the effects of service in Vietnam were more severe because, "to a degree unparalleled in other wars, combat in Vietnam involved killing women, children, and the elderly."[113]

Contemporary medical and sociological research fueled the perception that Vietnam vets faced unprecedented problems. Arthur Egendorf, lead author of a study commissioned by Congress and the VA, found that psychological problems among vets came from feelings of insecurity and instability. These stemmed from changing family and gender roles as well as vets' "loss of confidence in themselves as men." Among the problems identified by the study were unemployment, alcoholism, and drug use. Vets experienced "feelings of alienation" and "isolation from peers" and anger at "the lack of a hero's welcome" and at "the fact that they were not embraced by society as brave warriors."[114] These issues were exacerbated by continued debates over the merits of the war, especially as partisans used vets' problems "as a further indictment of the other's mistakes, while ignoring the way their own sympathy for veterans adds to the problem." Each side framed veterans as victims in order to score political points. Egendorf, echoing the rhetoric employed by the VVLP, argued: "Veterans need self-respect, not pity." The rejection of stereotypes would both benefit vets and promote political unity.[115]

Articles sympathetic to veterans sometimes suggested that their psychological problems were understandable precisely because of doubts about their manhood. "Vietnam Vets: Fighting for Their Rights," a *Time* cover story by Lance Morrow about the ongoing debate over veterans'

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[113] Herbert Hendin and Ann Pollinger Haas, "Vietnam Veterans' Trauma," *New York Times*, 11 November 1984, E21. See also Herbert Hendin and Ann Pollinger Haas, *Wounds of War: The Psychological Aftermath of Combat in Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[114] Egendorf, *Legacies of Vietnam*.

[115] Arthur Egendorf, "Vietnam Goes On," *New York Times*, 25 May 1981, A15.

benefits, began by once again comparing Vietnam and World War II vets. Of the homecoming accorded men "after Kilroy crushed Tojo and Hitler," Morrow noted that "[n]othing was too good for these wonderful guys. The mere uniform made a man a hero." On the other hand, the "boys" came back from Southeast Asia quietly and alone, not as part of a victorious army. This "abrupt, surreal transition" was further complicated by vets' youth: "It was the nation's first teenaged war. An adolescent might be old enough to look upon (even perform) horrors that would make Goya turn away. But back home, he was not old enough to drink." The value of their military service was also subject to question. Veterans faced accusations of having committed atrocities and to insults like those of "some pus-gut in an American Legion cap," who allegedly spat on returning soldiers while calling them "candy-ass losers."[116] However, attitudes toward vets were changing, partly as a result of the greater understanding of their psychological problems that accompanied the official definition of post-traumatic stress disorder in 1980.[117] Morrow also suggested that more Americans would sympathize for vets as their grief and anger over the war faded. This process would be complicated, however, because the war had created so much confusion that "[c]itizens no longer knew what their citizenship meant [and] men no longer knew what their manhood demanded."[118]

As Morrow's article suggested, the impact of the feminist movement of the 1970s on the American workforce caused consternation among vets, particularly the leaders of the VVLP.[119]

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[116] Lance Morrow, "The Forgotten Warriors," *TIME*, 13 July 1981, 18-19.

[117] Ibid., 21.

[118] Ibid., 23.

[119] For a more sympathetic treatment of the women's movement, see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Benita Roth offers a thoughtful overview of divisions within the feminist movement. See Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to*

Media coverage of the debate over benefits sometimes noted disapprovingly that mandatory hiring preferences curtailed career opportunities for women, as "women score[d] near the top in Civil Service examinations, only to end up near the bottom of appointment lists after preferences are awarded."[120] One writer supported preferences for Vietnam vets, but advocated the elimination of the same consideration for older vets because it would "hurt the chances of women and blacks and other minorities trying to enlarge their numbers in better-paying federal jobs." The case of one woman who applied for a job as an air traffic controller served as an example. She received a perfect score on the exam and "would have ranked seventh on the basis of score, education, and experience, but when veterans' preference was factored in for other applicants, her rank dropped to 117th."[121] In the face of such criticisms, VVLP leaders sought to justify the preferences by pointing out that Vietnam veterans often faced discrimination as a result of stereotyping and their service in an unpopular war. James Webb, who served on the VVLP's national board of directors, noted a *Washington Post* interview that indicated that in the Bakke "reverse discrimination" case, Bakke had suffered discrimination because he served with the Marine Corps in Vietnam.[122]

Members of the VVLP sought to articulate the place of men on the shifting terrain of gender relations. As the women's movement affected popular understandings of the meaning

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Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[120] "The Right Kind of Veterans' Preference," *New York Times*, 21 April 1978, A26.

[121] Otten, "Congress and the Veterans Lobby."

[122] Horne, *Wounded Generation*, 115. Alan Bakke, a 35-year-old white man, had applied twice to medical school at the University of California at Davis and was rejected both times, though his grades and test scores were higher than those of some admitted applicants. Bakke sued, arguing that he had suffered racial discrimination due to the university's policy of setting aside a certain number of places in each class for minorities. In 1978, the Supreme Court ordered the medical school to admit Bakke. It is not clear whether Bakke believed that his veteran status was relevant to the case.

and importance of masculinity, it prompted vets to offer competing definitions. In 1980, Betty Freidan announced that "[m]achismo…died in Vietnam" and declared that the coming decade would be a time for men to redefine their identities, as women had done in the '70s. In response, James Webb argued that machismo had not died in Vietnam, but in the United States, "among the people who had to question who they are as a male because, through one way or another, they avoided what it essentially the quintessentially male function in a society, and that's going into uniform." Indeed, he emphasized the supposedly trans-historical nature of connections between manhood and military service and argued that this relationship precluded the rethinking Freidan had suggested. Instead, Webb defined manhood as "[d]efending your society. Taking up arms and defending your society, in the history of the world and in every civilization that exists today."[123] John Wheeler's position, that "military service is anciently associated with manhood," was much the same.[124]

Wheeler took a special interest in debates about veterans and used his position in the VVLP to contribute to them. In the early 1980s, several major newspapers, including the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* and *USA Today*, published essays written by Wheeler on their editorial pages. Each of Wheeler's contributions addressed stereotypes of Vietnam veterans and many of them explicitly referenced public perceptions of vets' masculinity. Wheeler asserted that a "despised war helped to elevate femininity and undermine masculinity."[125] He explained that "our culture's celebration of femininity came to the fore at about the same time as the Vietnam War" because of Americans' desire to distance themselves from an unpopular war and

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[123] Ibid., 108.

[124] John P. Wheeler III, "Vietnam Veterans' Gains," *New York Times*, 28 May 1984, 19.

[125] John Wheeler, "…A Resource going to waste," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 May 1984, 13.

their equation of masculinity and military service.[126] Wheeler elaborated on this idea in a 1984 book, *Touched with Fire*. He concluded that "surely Vietnam veterans were men; and surely America veered away from us….We still do not know what manliness is. Maybe the masculine principle *is* that there are things worth dying for."[127] Most Americans, he said, felt threatened by this notion. Hence "the Vietnam veteran ha[d] become an emotionally, sexually, and politically charged symbol."[128]

Much of Wheeler's work emphasized that veterans' readjustment problems resulted from the feminization of American culture brought about by the war and the women's movement. In the 1960s, he explained, "[m]en grew long hair. They started 'sharing' an idea instead of 'telling' it. Some men looked like women, and vice versa, and Americans were doing a double take. The culture became a *bit* more feminine. But for a big country, a bit is a lot."[129] Indeed, the war in Vietnam made feminists' gains possible: "Much of the fiery energy of the women's movement came from the idea that the Vietnam War, the institutions of war, and perhaps all institutions, were inhumane or stifling, that the war itself was defiling. War was a masculine thing, not a feminine thing." Because war and masculinity were so intimately connected, the unpopularity of the war had caused masculinity to go out of fashion. Wheeler summed up the changes he saw in American society: "The war was dirty and so too was masculinity. It was evident in the fashions of dress and language of the sixties. In America masculinity went out of

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[126] Wheeler, "Vietnam Veterans' Gains."

[127] Wheeler, *Touched With Fire*, 31.

[128] Ibid., 126.

[129] Ibid., 31.

fashion. In Vietnam masculinity did not go out of fashion. And in coming home most veterans never let it go, even if we had to turn inward and remain silent for ten years or longer."[130]

Wheeler also organized symposia and other public forums to address what he saw as the major problems facing veterans. In 1982, Wheeler convened a meeting of prominent Vietnam veterans with the aim of discussing topics ranging from the impact of the "collective memory of Vietnam [on] foreign policy" to the "personal maturity, wisdom, or inner peace that stem from successfully integrating, embracing, and affirming one's wartime military service."[131] Wheeler later sent a letter to participants encouraging them to write op-ed pieces that built on ideas raised during the conference.[132] He frequently turned the conversation at such events to the subject of masculinity. The agenda for a symposium in August 1982, for example, called for a third of the meeting to be devoted to personal and political relationships between men and women and the influence of feminism on attitudes toward the war and veterans.[133] Indeed, Wheeler claimed that the meeting derived its importance from its focus on gender.[134] He asked a women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, to publish the symposium, stressing that the magazine's readers would be

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[130] Ibid., 140-141.

[131] Letter from Jack Wheeler to Joseph C. Zengerle, Jr., 30 September 1982, Box 54, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[132] Letter from Jack Wheeler to "November 11 Group Member," Memorial Day 1983, Box 54, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[133] "Topic One…" [undated], Box 53, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[134] Letter from John Wheeler to Ken Emerson, 29 August 1982, Box 53, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

interested because "[t]he Vietnam War had enormous effects on the men and women in the Vietnam generation—and their relationships." *Cosmopolitan* declined the invitation.[135]

Concerns about the real or perceived impact of the war on the masculinity of vets were also evident in another symposium organized by Wheeler and printed by the *Washington Post*. Panelist and author Philip Caputo explained the effects of his service in Vietnam in terms of aggressive masculinity. Caputo noted that he had been recommended for both a Bronze Star for heroism and a general court-martial when his squad killed two villagers. The symposium's moderator, Richard Harwood, asked how Caputo thought the war had changed him from "a normal red-blooded American boy when [he] went over, gung ho." Caputo replied he did not begin "to feel mentally integrated again" until five or six years after his return. He recounted fits of violent anger and aggression and claimed that he had married his wife because "she was the only person [he] could be around that [he] didn't feel like breaking her jaw."[136] Other participants tried to explain how notions of masculinity had changed during the war. Writer and West Point graduate Lucian Truscott claimed: "Guys are walking around wondering how are you supposed to act as a guy. Nobody really knows how to act anymore. 'Macho' became a dirty word during these years. Macho used to be an OK thing to be."[137] One of the key reasons for this was a "deep division between men and women…center[ed] around the war." Truscott

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[135] Letter from John Wheeler to Myra Appleton, 18 November 1982, Box 53, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[136] Horne, *The Wounded Generation*, 113.

[137] Ibid., 108. The symposium, reprinted in this book, originally appeared in the *Washington Post* on 25 May 1980, on page B1 of the "Outlook" section. The VVMF later attempted to sell copies of the book at veterans' events, particularly the National Salute to Vietnam Veterans, and distributed copies of the book, along with a list of discussion questions, to schools. See Karen K. Bigelow, "Memo for the Record," 11 April 1983, Box 3, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

pointed out that "civilizations have constantly over the course of history called upon people to go and fight wars whenever wars have come along. And the people they've called upon have been men." Women, meanwhile, were "left free during those years to pursue the kinds of careers that make 49 percent of those women now part of the work force and to increase the number of their enrollments in law schools and whatever."[138]

Other prominent figures in the VVLP were equally dedicated to publishing material that reconstructed traditional associations between military service and masculinity. Tom Carhart's memoir about his experiences in Vietnam concentrated on themes of heroism and sacrifice.[139] Affirmation of the masculinity of military service was also central to *Fields of Fire*, Webb's 1978 novel about the war. One of the protagonists joined the Marines "for one reason: everybody talked about how bad they were."[140] Another, who had grown up hearing war stories about his father and grandfather, enlisted because he believed that "[m]an's noblest moment is the one spent on the fields of fire."[141] A review of the book declared that Webb had "rehabilitated the idea of the American hero—not John Wayne, to be sure, but every man, caught up in circumstances beyond his control, surviving the blood, dreck, and absurdity with dignity and even a certain élan."[142]

Webb also campaigned against the admission of women to military academies and combat roles. He linked men with "warriorhood" and the capacity to endure physical pain,

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[138] Ibid., 107.

[139] Tom Carhart, *The Offering*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1987).

[140] James Webb, *Fields of Fire* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 17.

[141] Ibid., 22.

[142] "Fields of Fire," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. This review was also quoted in a blurb on the book jacket.

drawing upon images of men as stoic and resolute soldiers. Webb spent three months lecturing and appearing on television and radio programs, trying to persuade the public that the Carter administration had "intimidated" military leaders in order to gain the Pentagon's approval for its plans.[143] He claimed that allowing women to attend service academies would "poison" their ability to train men for combat. Webb theorized that physical abuse and brutalization in military academies were crucial to the inculcation of "warriorhood." The presence of women would reduce the use of physical stress in the academies, limiting their ability to produce soldiers ready for battle. He suggested that the academies had a deleterious effect on women's self-esteem and caused them to have "problems with their sexuality." Moreover, the combat training that women would receive in the academies was unnecessary because women were ill-suited for battle. Webb explained, "[M]en fight better….Man must be more aggressive in order to perpetuate the human race. Women don't rape men, and it has nothing to do, obviously, with socially induced differences." Indeed, male sexual aggression was the foundation for success in battle; allowing women into combat would undermine this dynamic because within each unit, it would be directed "inward, toward sex, rather than outward, toward violence." Webb's argument rested on the assumption that "[i]nside the truck stops and honky-tonks, down on the street and out in the coal towns, American men are tough and violent."[144]

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[143] Brad Lemley, "Never Give an Inch: James Webb's struggles with pen and sword," *Washington Post Magazine*, 8 December 1985, 45-46.

[144] James Webb, "Women Can't Fight," *Washingtonian* 15:2 (November 1979).

In 1984, the Indiana VVLP presented country singer Charlie Daniels with a plaque to thank him for recording a song called "Still in Saigon" that lamented the difficult homecoming of Vietnam veterans. Program officials described Daniels as their "point man," and told him that his support, along with that of other public figures, was critical to their efforts.[145] Shortly thereafter, Daniels played in Nashville, Tennessee, where he told his audience that the concert was being broadcast in the Soviet Union via the Voice of America radio service.[146] Initial boos from those in the crowd turned to cheers when Daniels explained that the broadcast was intended to illustrate the pleasure of "being alive and in Tennessee." Daniels told a reporter: "I can't think of any better propaganda than the sound of 10,000 obviously free people in Nashville's Municipal Auditorium screaming."[147] A few months later, President Reagan praised the musician for making "his talent available for worthy causes, including the fact that he has been heard by an audience estimated at a hundred million people on the Voice of America in which his music has been played."[148] The songs and political activism of Charlie Daniels were not the only facets of American culture and politics that reflected the shared concerns of Reagan and the VVLP. By the mid-1980s, their views held considerable sway in the media and were increasingly represented in American political culture.

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[145] Jack Hurst, "Charlie Daniels: A patriot with roots in the country," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 March 1984, K11. See also "Notes, Charlie Daniels Band at Holiday Star, 1984," File 59, Box 1, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

[146] Voice of America, which began broadcasting during World War II, was used by the U.S. Information Agency to broadcast American news and cultural programs throughout the Cold War as part of an American program of cultural diplomacy. See Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

[147] Hurst, "Charlie Daniels: A patriot with roots in the country."

[148] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Congressional Fish Fry" (June 21, 1984). See John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40084.

Rhetoric linking masculinity and foreign policy played an even greater role in Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign than it had in 1980. The President enjoyed a 30-point lead among white males, which one observer attributed to Reagan's personification "of a resurgent masculinity coupled with growing anti-feminism…He's tapped into a deep, cultural resentment—a furious counterattack by both the bewildered and the resentful." Opponent Walter Mondale, on the other hand, was derided as a "wimp" who had selected a woman as his running mate and would be unable to stand up to the Soviet Union.[149] Conservative writer Dinesh D'Souza explained: "Men, who suffered psychological castration in Vietnam and Iran, had their confidence about American power restored in Grenada. Historically, women have gotten their way through manipulation and dialogue: female differences are almost never settled with blows or weapons. Thus, it is difficult for women to view strength as a solution to problems and rivalries."[150]

This endorsement of a vigorous foreign policy was reflected in the "new patriotism" of the growing number of young men who chose to join the military. A *Washington Post* columnist suggested this phenomenon was spurred by men "too young for Vietnam to have seared in their minds….They were pre-schoolers when returning Vietnam veterans threw their medals into a waste bin in front of the Capitol."[151] Another writer hoped: "Perhaps this New Patriotism signals the end of reflexive America hating, navel contemplation, and ardent feminism." The article was accompanied by an illustration that showed the progression of American manhood from the

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[149] Richard Cohen, "Fritzbusters," *Washington Post*, 28 September 1984, A21.

[150] Dinesh D'Souza, "To Really 'Balance' His Ticket, Mondale Needed a Man," *Washington Post*, 12 August 1984, B1-2.

[151] Colman McCarthy, "Gung-Ho Generation: No More 'No' to War?" *Washington Post*, 6 November 1983, K2.

long-haired hippies of the 1960s to young patriots who read *Soldier of Fortune* and volunteered for service in the armed forces. (See Figure 5.)[152] A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* suggested that the apparent cultural shift had disabused feminists of their more radical notions. He quoted a "feminist delegate to the Democratic National Convention" who realized with evident wonder that she had just been "waving the flag and singing 'God Bless America.'"[153]

Figure 5

Commentary in the press sought to refute stereotypes of veterans. In 1981, an uproar arose over PBS documentary about a troubled vet shown on Veterans Day. "Frank: A Vietnam Veteran" told the story of a former GI who returned from the war wracked with guilt. In the years after his homecoming, his marriage dissolved, he struggled with homosexuality, he succumbed to drug use, and he feared that he would fly into a rage and murder his children. The *New York Times* declared that this was a "vicious stereotype" and noted that the establishment of the VVLP would combat such perceptions of vets. The editorial, in an echo of Reagan's 1980 campaign address to the VFW, concluded by suggesting that Americans should recognize that "the vast majority of men and women who fought in the war did so with a nobility worthy of the

[152] Art Harris, "The New Patriotism: Flags and Fatigues on the March Again," *Washington Post*, 18 December 1983, K1, K14-15.

[153] Ernest Conine, "America, a Land of Patriots Again," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1984, B5.

cause."[154] Michael Blumenthal, a poet who had feigned homosexuality to avoid military service, remarked in a *New York Times* essay that he lacked an ineffable quality common among vets. Attempting to describe what that was, he said it was made up of "realism, discipline, masculinity (kind of a dirty word these days), resilience, tenacity, resourcefulness." Vietnam vets, he suspected, "turn[ed] out to be better *men,* in the best sense of the word."[155] A 1983 essay, "Women are Getting Out of Hand," reiterated the concerns about feminism articulated by VVLP members and suggested that the women's movement had led to "the assumption that while women possess a superabundance of qualities that would, if transplanted to men, bring peace and glory to the lesser sex, men do not possess a comparable set of gifts to bestow on their opposites." Feminists believed that such "standard male characteristics" as "aggressiveness, forthrightness, [and] companionability" were worthless.[156] According to John Wheeler, this essay usefully exposed a "double standard" that plagued men, and agreed that "because of the Vietnam War, [Americans] have denied that there is an essential male quality to affirm."[157]

Media coverage of this type indicated the growing influence of the VVLP's understandings of masculinity and the role of the war in American political culture. After three years in operation, the group regarded its public relations campaign as largely successful. More than 700 articles about VVLP programs had appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout

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[154] "Free the Veterans," *New York Times*, 11 November, 1981, 26. In a continued show of support for Vietnam vets, the VFW and American Legion also publicly objected to the program. See John J. O'Connor, "TV: Vietnam Veteran Recounts His Travails," *New York Times*, 11 November 1981, C31. The author concluded that, given the problems outlined in the documentary, "many Vietnam veterans need considerably more than marching bands."

[155] Michael Blumenthal, "Of Arms and Men," *New York Times*, 1 January 1981, E23.

[156] Roger Rosenblatt, "Women Are Getting Out of Hand," *TIME*, 18 July 1983, 72.

[157] Wheeler, *Touched With Fire*, 142.

the country. In a 1983 meeting with participants in a VVLP training conference, President Reagan noted that "a large amount of favorable media attention to this program has been attracted and has done much to destroy what was a very false stereotype."[158] He echoed the VVLP's contention that negative attitudes toward Vietnam vets were a product of biased media coverage, adding that he couldn't "help but wonder if the media had been as helpful while the war was going on and while you were there, there might never have been the stereotype to begin with."[159] In 1984, Robert W. Summers, director of the northern California branch of the VVLP, believed that "more and more" employers saw vets as men who had "been tested under some of the most trying conditions in war." According to Summers, "These are the kinds of skills a company should be looking for in its workers."[160]

During a reception in honor of the VVLP's 1984 transition to private funding, Reagan stressed the importance of the VVLP in shaping American political culture. "Forgive me if I sound a little proud," he began, "but you know we started with little more than an idea nearly three years ago…[W]e sought to play a catalytic role; the idea was to develop a self-sustaining network of programs independent of bureaucracy that would mobilize successful veterans as volunteers…this goal has been accomplished." Reagan praised the "dedication," "selflessness," and "spirit of independence" of VVLP leaders and promised that he would continue to support the program. He equated the struggles of VVLP leaders with their experiences in a combat zone: "Over a decade ago when battle raged across Vietnam, many of you…were fighting—steadfast and loyal—for your country and the principles for which it stands. Today, once again, you have

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[158] Ibid., 58-64.

[159] "Remarks of the President at the Conference of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program," 28 January 1983, Folder 9, Box 3, CRA185—Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program of Indiana Records.

[160] Shiver, "Outlook for Nation's Veterans Improving."

stepped forward when your country called…" Through their service in the military and the VVLP, vets were "working to build a stronger America."[161]

Yet the President and VVLP leaders believed that there was work still to be done. "The Vietnam veteran," John Wheeler declared in 1984, was still "portrayed as either an emasculated misfit or a supercharged sexual symbol. And this, in turn, yields further insights into the social and political dynamics of his generation." Wheeler noted that the VVLP had done much to combat the problem. But he hoped that another program, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), which was responsible for the construction of a national monument honoring those who served in Vietnam, would also "enlist veterans to defeat the losers' image."[162] Like the VVLP, the VVMF received substantial support from the Reagan administration, and many VVLP organizers also held leadership posts in the VVMF. The next chapter will turn to a discussion of the VVMF's efforts to build a memorial to Vietnam veterans on the National Mall, a campaign that created a national controversy over representations of vets and over the role of the war in American political culture.

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[161] "Presidential Remarks: Reception for the Vietnam Veterans Leadership program, Thursday, March 1, 1984" [draft dated 29 February 1984], Folder: Reception for Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program {Dolan) (Timmons) March 1, 1984, Box 137—Speech Drafts, Speechwriting, White House Office of: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

[162] Wheeler, "Vietnam Veterans' Gains."

Chapter 5: Memorializing Masculinity

Jan Scruggs, the founder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), almost always began his story by explaining that he had seen *The Deer Hunter* the night that he decided to build a Vietnam memorial. The 1978 film portrayed Americans as victims of a savage North Vietnamese enemy, "reversing key images of the war [and] helping to canonize U.S. prisoners of war as the most significant symbols of American manhood for the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond."[1] Scruggs, a self-described "redneck," identified with the film's main characters, a trio of working-class men from a small Pennsylvania town. In 1969, at the age of eighteen, he had left his own working-class family in Bowie, Maryland to enlist in the Army. Scruggs served as rifleman in the 199th Light Infantry and returned home a year later with a wound from a rocket-propelled grenade. Back in Maryland, Scruggs temporarily worked as a security guard, then spent five months on a road trip with a friend from Vietnam, "smoking dope, raising hell, and hanging out on Indian reservations." Scruggs later put himself through college and secured a job with the Department of Labor. After he saw *The Deer Hunter* in March 1979, Scruggs spent most of the night awake, drinking whiskey and wrestling with flashbacks. By dawn, he had decided that a

[1] Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 15. Numerous scholars have offered interpretations of the film and its significance. See Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, 171-188; Martini, *Invisible Enemies*, 54-62; and Leonard Quart, "*The Deer Hunter*: Superman in Vietnam," in Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 159-168.

memorial would put to rest many of the social and political issues that surrounded the war in Vietnam.[2]

The VVMF's objectives simultaneously departed from and reinforced prior veterans politics. The organization explicitly sought to dissociate veterans from the war rather than encouraging the conflation of the two. The VVMF aimed to rehabilitate the image of vets by reminding the public that individuals were not responsible for the unpopular war in which they had fought—that the "warrior could be separated from the war."[3] Yet a bitter dispute among VVMF leaders over the monument's design highlighted the project's impact on American political culture. Scruggs frequently declared that the memorial was not intended to make a political statement, yet the VVMF's attempt to change perceptions of Vietnam vets contributed to the ongoing politicization of veterans affairs and ultimately contributed to the conflation of former servicemen and the conflict in which they had served. The VVLP organizers, especially Jack Wheeler, who quickly became involved in the VVMF, reinforced this tendency. They fused their conservative politics and notions of masculinity with Scruggs's efforts to create a distinction between the war and its veterans.

The Reagan administration capitalized on the publicity that the controversy garnered in the national press. The president's advisers ensured that he carefully avoided taking a position on the design controversy. However, First Lady Nancy Reagan's position as a member of the

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[2] Christopher Buckley, "The Wall," 61-73. The quote about "smoking dope, raising hell, and hanging out on Indian reservations appears on page 64 of that article. Similar biographical details can be found in Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 452. For Scruggs's version of the impact *The Deer Hunter* had on him, see Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 7. Scruggs is quoted describing himself as a redneck in Elisabeth Bumiller, "The Memorial, Mirror of Vietnam; The Lives the Monument Touched, the Passions It Aroused and the Statue That May Speed the Healing," *Washington Post*, 9 November 1984, F1.

[3] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 17.

VVMF's "National Sponsoring Committee" permitted the administration to maintain close ties to the organization. Once the president was certain that the memorial had widespread public support, Reagan highlighted the administration's affiliation with the project and agreed to speak at the 1984 dedication ceremony. Though the VVMF received no federal funding, this maneuvering allowed Reagan to utilize the project to further his political aims as he had done with the VVLP.

Reagan, like Scruggs, hoped that the memorial would encourage a moment of national reconciliation, an outcome suggested by some historians. James Patterson describes the Wall's dedication and the accompanying festivities as a "healing occasion" on which "vets marched in a cathartic 'welcome home' parade."[4] In his history of the VVAW, Gerald Nicosia declares: "The Wall, once it was unveiled to America, would somehow sweep all partisan concerns aside, and carry the nation forward with an unstoppable momentum of healing that took both its supporters and opponents by complete surprise."[5] Gil Troy credits a politically adroit president with using the 1982 dedication to "change the subject" in the wake of Democratic gains in the midterm elections and to distract the public from the shortcomings of the Reagan Revolution. Reagan, Troy argues, exploited the memorial to "unify the nation around his vision. Throughout the decade, Reagan's once controversial celebration of Vietnam as a 'noble cause' would become increasingly mainstreamed in the American collective memory."[6]

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[4] James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States From Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183.

[5] Nicosia, *Home To War*, 493. Nicosia mentions the memorial only briefly and ignores the design controversy, though he does note the VVAW's reluctance to support the project, which the organization feared would detract attention from veterans issues that it deemed more pressing.

[6] Troy, *Morning in America,* 85, 111.

More detailed studies of the monument have offered explorations of how the monument's dedication highlighted, rather then obscured, divisions in the national body politic caused by the war. Indeed, the controversy engendered by its design was an "allegory for the Vietnam War itself and the ways in which the war has stayed alive in American culture."[7] The story of the memorial thus illuminates the "relationship of individuals and bodies to nations and to patriotism and nationalism."[8] In his work on public memory in the twentieth-century U.S., John Bodnar argues that the controversy over the memorial was a struggle between a "vernacular" and "official" cultures. On one side were veterans and "ordinary people…directly involved in the war." Their opponents were "guardians of the nation," "representatives of an overarching or official culture which resisted cultural expressions that minimized the degree to which service in Vietnam may have been valorous."[9] However, these interpretations suggest that veterans for the most part "eschewed politics in the name of reconciliation, in an effort to pull together the divided veterans' community and a still-embattled public."[10] Though this "supposedly apolitical approach might ultimately be politically significant," as Patrick Hagopian

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[7] Hass, *Carried To the Wall*, 3. Arnold R. Isaacs likewise argues: "The moral confusion of the war was mirrored in the postwar debate over how to remember it." Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 8.

[8] Hass, *Carried To the Wall*, 4.

[9] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-13. Bodnar notes that James Webb and Tom Carhart, veterans who vigorously opposed the memorial, and thus came down on the side of the "guardians of the nation," were "graduates of service academies where they had been fully exposed to the ideologies of national service and glory." Yet this does not fully explain their decision to side with the proponents of "official culture." Jack Wheeler, a VVMF leader and supporter of the Wall, was in Carhart's class at West Point. This point is also made by Patrick Hagopian. See Hagopian, *The Social Memory of the Vietnam War*, 308-309.

[10] Hagopian, *The Social Memory of the Vietnam War*, 285.

concedes, the existing literature on the memorial has paid little attention to the role of veterans' politics in its construction.[11]

While such work offers important contributions to the scholarship on public memory and commemoration, it often assumes, rather than explains, the political and cultural divisions that lingered after the conflict.[12] Indeed, the clashing political agendas of veterans who built the memorial exacerbated divisions rather than closing them.[13] By placing the debate over a national memorial in the context of a movement that aimed to reshape vets' collective image, this chapter reveals the political processes that contributed to those fissures. The conservative veterans at the center of the design controversy were deeply enmeshed in the partisan politics of the 1970s and '80s. Their concerns about the memorial were not only about how to remember the conflict or those who served in it. They hoped to use their status as veterans to achieve goals shared by many conservatives, including developing hawkish Cold War policies and undermining the civil rights and feminist movements. Most of all, they wanted to cement their status as masculine, specially entitled citizens.

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[11] Ibid., 363. Hagopian does discuss the political concerns of those on both sides of the debate, but his account seems to take vets' assertions that their aims in building the memorial were apolitical at face value. Hass notes that some vets viewed the memorial design as an "affront to veteran and conservative manhood," and briefly mentions the partisan politics that undergirded the fight over the monument, but emphasizes that these politics and the subsequent design compromise simply "reflect[ed] the impossibility of finding a single design that could represent the Vietnam War for all Americans." Hass, *Carried To the Wall*, 15-18.

[12] Michael Allen's work on the politics of the POW/MIA movement is a notable exception to this trend.

[13] As Scott A. Sandage has shown in his work on the Lincoln Memorial and the civil rights movement, memorials that recall contested events, such as the Civil War or Vietnam, can be powerful sites for a "politics of memory." Sandage argues that civil rights activists who protested at the Lincoln Memorial "mobilized mainstream symbols to further alternative ends, to constitute (not just reflect) shared beliefs, and to open spaces for social change." Most Vietnam vets did not seek the same sort of progressive social changes as the activists in Sandage's study, but they, too, sought to use the memorial as a platform from which to launch an agenda for change. Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939, 1963," *Journal of American History* 80:1 (June 1993), 138.

In this context, the memorial controversy represented a breakdown in the consensus that veterans and policymakers had worked for two decades to craft. Indeed, images of veterans and questions about their manhood were the crux of the memorial debate. Most of the key figures in the controversy had worked with the VVLP to ensure that Vietnam vets were associated with their carefully constructed definition of masculinity. Yet the design chosen for the monument failed to reflect their vision. The memorial, a simple wall of black granite bearing the name of every American soldier killed in Vietnam, seemed to its opponents to conspicuously ignore living veterans while highlighting the conflict's human costs. This somber message, they argued, contradicted the VVLP's celebration of vets' manly heroism. Moreover, their disagreement, covered in minute detail by the press, fueled fears among vets that the process of building the memorial would ultimately tarnish the image of veterans. Conservative vets and the Reagan administration had hoped that the VVMF would reinforce the VVLP's message, but the memorial project revealed profound divisions among vets.

These fractures undermined the Wall's possibility as a symbol of national reconciliation and, on the contrary, further politicized the Vietnam War. The completion of the monument in 1984 marked a turning point in the Vietnam veterans movement.[14] The controversy engendered an outpouring of support from people across the nation. Many vets saw the dedication of the memorial as a sign that they had succeeded in changing how their fellow citizens thought about Vietnam vets, an impression that was reinforced by the subsequent building of memorials across the country. Yet the acrimony over the design also reinforced deep political rifts. Tensions among vets lingered after the dedication of the memorial, inspiring and consolidating a

[14] The Vietnam Memorial has two dedication dates. The first, in 1982, marks the completion of the black granite wall design by Maya Lin. There was a second dedication in 1984 when a sculpture of three soldiers by Fredrick Hart was added to the site.

remarkably conservative cohort of veterans. Moreover, arguments among vets over the monument's representation of masculinity showed that efforts to create a uniform, manly image for vets had fully forged a consensus about what masculinity meant.

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Though Scruggs intended to build an apolitical memorial, the project was politicized from the first. Most Vietnam veterans were at first deeply skeptical of the plan. Scruggs found few supporters at the veterans meeting where he initially laid out his ideas. Many argued that the project would simply siphon resources away from initiatives they deemed more important. Indeed, they feared that a memorial would provide an opportunity to offer token support for veterans issues without committing tangible resources. As one vet later observed, "There's no political cost in lining up behind the flag and supporting a veterans' monument, but members of Congress won't line up on more important issues like psychological adjustment aid or treatment of Agent Orange victims."[15] Others suggested that the lack of funding for existing veterans programs indicated that it would be extremely difficult to garner public support for the project.

However, after the meeting, one veteran approached Scruggs to express his support. Attorney Robert Doubek advised Scruggs to establish a nonprofit corporation and begin fundraising. The VVMF was, accordingly, incorporated on April 27, 1979. One month later, apparently undaunted by the lack of enthusiasm he had encountered, Scruggs held a press conference and announced his plans for a memorial funded by private donations. "The only

[15] Ward Sinclair, "Vietnam Memorial: Another Symbol of Frustration for Vets," *Washington Post*, 26 May 1980, A3.

thing we're worried about is raising too much money," he declared. Scruggs estimated that it would take only a few months to raise a million dollars, the memorial's projected cost.[16] Over the next month, Scruggs collected a total of $144.50 in donations.[17]

As was the case in the VVLP, networking and a masculine model of interpersonal relations played a pivotal role in the VVMF. Indeed, the leadership of the two organizations overlapped significantly. Derisive press coverage of the VVMF's failed fundraising effort caught the attention of John Wheeler, who contacted Scruggs and explained that he had recently helped build a Southeast Asia memorial at West Point and believed his experience might be useful to the struggling campaign. Wheeler depended on a carefully nurtured web of connections made in Washington and through the military, especially the service academies, to generate support for the VVLP. Three members of the small circle of vets in charge of the VVMF—Wheeler, Art Mosley, and Tom Carhart—had graduated from West Point in 1966. Jim Webb, who was also affiliated with the organization, was a member of the Naval Academy's class of 1966. General Michael S. Davison, who had been the superintendent at West Point when the VVMF leaders were cadets, used his influence on behalf of the Fund and helped broker an agreement when controversy over the memorial design arose. Carhart, who would succeed Wheeler as the national director of the VVLP, attended his first VVMF meeting in April 1980. When he learned that the organization needed $31,000 to launch a direct-mail campaign, Carhart exploited his West Point affiliation to secure the required money. He persuaded a bank

[16] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 8.

[17] Ibid., 8-9.

president, whom he knew to be a West Pointer, to offer an unsecured loan of $45,000. As collateral, Carhart pledged his "sacred honor."[18]

The VVMF's fundraising efforts relied on political connections as well as personal relationships. In late 1979, the VVMF formed a "National Sponsoring Committee" intended to lend credibility to direct-mail appeals for donations. Committee members were nationally-known personalities: the entertainer Bob Hope, First Lady Rosalynn Carter, former President Gerald Ford, Nancy Reagan, General William C. Westmoreland, Admiral James J. Stockdale, and James Webb. The billionaire Texan H. Ross Perot provided much of the financing for the initial mailing.[19] The VVMF's first major contributions came from defense contractors and other corporate donors who pledged their support after Senator John Warner hosted a breakfast to raise money for the memorial.[20]

The goals of the VVMF, at least initially, also closely resembled those of the VVLP. First, VVMF leaders posited that changing the image of vets was a necessary first step in the process of securing material benefits. Scruggs explained that the ultimate aim of the project was to encourage government officials and the public to "recognize the value of service in Vietnam." Then the "road would be open to meeting the other real needs of the war's survivors and their families."[21] Second, Scruggs was wary of possible federal contributions to the VVMF, which

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[18] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 459.

[19] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 23.

[20] For an account of this breakfast, including VVMF leaders' consternation when Warner's wife, the actress Elizabeth Taylor, appeared wearing "a pink housecoat and slippers with white pompoms," see Atkinson, 457-458, and Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 20-22. A list of donors appears in a letter from Robert W. Doubek to James H. Schofield, 30 July 1980, Box 27, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[21] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 44.

might make veterans seem needy. Like VVLP organizers, he viewed the initiative as an opportunity to highlight vets' self-sufficiency.[22] Moreover, he was doubtful about policymakers' commitment to veterans issues and worried that their involvement would politicize the memorial. Vets' early reactions to the project also indicated that they would be quick to criticize the VVMF if they believed that it was diverting funding from programs provding more tangible services.[23]

Despite these reservations, Congressional support was essential to the VVMF's success. The VVMF wanted to contruct the memorial on federally controlled parkland, which would require the passage of new legislation. In a 1979 meeting with Scruggs, Wheeler, and Doubek, Republican Senator Charles Mathias suggested building in Constitution Gardens on the Mall in Washington. VVMF leaders were pleased with the visibility the site afforded and even more delighted by its symbolism.[24] Wheeler believed that the monument would eradicate memories of the antiwar demonstrations that had taken place on the Mall during the conflict.[25] These themes were echoed in a press conference held by Mathias on Veterans Day in 1979 to announce the introduction of a bill, co-sponsored by 26 senators, which would grant the VVMF the Constitution Gardens spot.[26] On July 1, 1980, Congress passed Public Law 96-297, endorsing the memorial and approving the site.

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[22] Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 11.

[23] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation,* 44.

[24] Ibid., 16.

[25] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 454. Robert Doubek raised the same themes shortly before Congressional approval for the site was granted; see Ward Sinclair, "Vietnam Memorial: Another Symbol of Frustration for Vets," *Washington Post*, 26 May 1980, A3.

[26] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 17-18. Several weeks before this press conference, similar legislation had been introduced in the House by Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt, a Republican from Arkansas and Webb's former boss. Webb had asked Hammerschmidt to do so, but he had not told

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The process of selecting a design for the memorial showcased Vietnam veterans' eagerness to reshape their image. A disagreement over the design for the memorial and its representation of masculinity quickly developed into a battle waged on the pages of the nation's newspapers. Indeed, the most common criticism of the memorial was that it was "anti-heroic." The tensions devolved into accusations of Communist infiltration and financial and sexual impropriety, as well as personal attacks on opponents' manhood and military service. Moreover, the dispute demonstrated the links between vets' image and the role of the war in American political culture. Though the VVMF sought to "separate the warrior from the war," media coverage suggested that the memorial's significance lay in its possible influence on memories of the war.

After securing Congressional approval for its chosen site, the VVMF turned to the design for the memorial. In July 1980, the Fund announced that an open, juried competition would be held and hired Washington architect Paul D. Spreiregen to oversee the process. However, the VVMF lacked the funds needed to underwrite the competition. Indeed, they hoped that the selection of a design would jumpstart contributions. Jan Scruggs thus persuaded H. Ross Perot to fund the contest, despite the fears of other VVMF board members that "Perot's generosity

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others in the VVMF about his plans ahead of time. They were furious when they learned what had happened, fearing that the House resolution would undermine the effect of Mathias's press conference. Scruggs called Hammerschmidt's office and complained that the Congressman was ruining the VVMF's efforts. See Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 454-455. Scrugg's accusations about Hammerschmidt foreshadowed his growing fixation on the notion that members of the VVMF were constantly under attack.

might make him feel like he had a special license to comment on whatever design was eventually selected."[27]

The VVMF tried to avoid politicizing the contest or the memorial. Spreiregen initially suggested that the Fund invite Vietnam vets and others personally affected by the war to sit on the jury, but board members believed that the design would be less subject to debate if it were chosen based on its artistic merits. They assembled a jury comprised of two architects, three landscape architects, and three sculptors, all of them prominent figures in the art world.[28] However, the VVMF reserved the right to screen potential jurors to ensure that they "demonstrated sufficient sensitivity to what service in Vietnam had meant," and John Wheeler drew up a reading list of books by vets for them.[29] The only requirements imposed on entries were that they make no political statement and that they list the names of all American military personnel killed in the war. A statement of purpose that Robert Doubek wrote for the competition explained that the memorial's goal was to "recognize and honor those who served and died."[30] Wheeler predicted: "Whatever design we come up with will be one thousand degrees hot. There will be a fight."[31] The competition was thus intended to guarantee that the winning entry would be chosen for its artistic merit.

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[27] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 61. See also Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line,* 464.

[28] The jury members were Pietro Belluschi, Grady Clay, Garrett Eckbo, Richard H. Hunt, Constantino Nivola, James Rosati, Hideo Sasaki, and Harry M. Weese.

[29] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 49-52.

[30] Ibid., 53.

[31] Ibid., 50.

According to the jurors, the winner of the competition, entry number 1026, was "very much a memorial of our own times, one that could not have been achieved in another time or place."[32] The jury's decision, announced on May 1, 1981, after five days spent reviewing the 1,421 competition entries, was unanimous. The winner, a pastel drawing by Yale undergraduate Maya Ying Lin, showed two sloping black walls joined at an obtuse angle and set into a hillside. (See Figure 6.)[33] The submission, the panel said, "most clearly [met] the spirit and formal requirements of the program" and created "a place of quiet reflection and a tribute to those who served their nation in difficult times. All who come here can find it a place of healing." Jurors praised the way in which the "eloquent place" would blend with its surroundings, gesturing to the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument but "entering the earth rather than piercing the sky."[34]

[32] "Design Competition: Jury's Statement," Box 32, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[33] VVMF file photo reproduced in Scruggs and Swerdlow. It depicts a mock-up of the design created for the press conference at which the results of the competition were announced.

[34] "Design Competition: Jury's Statement," Box 32, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Figure 6
(From left to right: Jan Scruggs, Maya Lin, and Robert Doubek)

The Fund's board members were nonplussed by the jurors' choice, but their political concerns forced them to set aside their uncertainty. Scruggs's first thought was that Lin's sketch "looked like a bat." Doubek acknowledged that he was "surprised" by the jurors' choice, but hastened to add, "When the genius of this simple concept took its effect on us, we embraced and congratulated one another."[35] When the winning design was unveiled, Wheeler did not understand what the black lines he saw were intended to represent, but believed it necessary to react decisively and positively. Rising to his feet, he pronounced the design "a work of genius" and began to applaud. He hoped that in doing so, he might forestall the expected dissent regarding the chosen design.[36]

Yet three of the most outspoken critics of the design were VVMF affiliates evidently uninterested in its artistic merit. Once the jury's choice was made public, Perot called Scruggs

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[35] Wolf Von Eckardt, "Of Heart and Mind: The Serene Grace of the Vietnam Memorial," *Washington Post*, 16 May 1981, B1, B4.

[36] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 466-467.

and informed him that the VVMF had made "a big, big mistake." The proposed monument, he complained, was "not heroic [and] something for New York City intellectuals."[37] James Webb had hoped for something more unapologetically heroic. Indeed, Webb had previously noted with dismay the construction of an abstract Vietnam memorial in Austin, Texas, which he thought looked disconcertingly like an egg carton. He had asked Wheeler to promise that the VVMF's effort would be more representational.[38] Tom Carhart was similarly dismayed that the memorial would not be a figurative statue. In fact, he had resigned from the VVLP and checked out a library book entitled *Anyone Can Sculpt* in order to submit such a design to the competition. His proposal was a gold statue depicting an officer standing on a Purple Heart and lifting a dead soldier into a helicopter.[39] The scene closely resembled one Carhart had described in his memoir.

The objections raised by Perot, Webb, and Carhart, which revealed concerns about masculinity and partisan politics, foreshadowed those that would be made by other observers. Webb and Carhart lamented the design's failure to endorse the heroic, militarized masculinity central to the VVLP's mission. They objected in particular to the abstract design; both hoped for a realistic representation, like the one submitted by Carhart, that would send an unambiguous message.[40] Perot shared these concerns and went a step beyond in his accusation of elitism.

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[37] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 67-68.

[38] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 465. Webb was unmoved by Wheeler's request that he think of the design as the Eiffel Tower, something that "needs time to understand." Ibid., 468.

[39] Ibid., 465-466. The idea was likely derived from one of Carhart's experiences in combat; he described a similar scene in his memoir. The death of the soldier, Carhart's radio operator, represents the "offering" referred to in the book's title. Carhart, *The Offering*, 145.

[40] Yet the abstract quality of Lin's design likely accounts for the memorial's popularity in both the 1980s and the present. Patrick Hagopian argues: "The metaphoric quality of Maya Lin's wall, it capacity to

This rhetoric echoed the suggestion often made by conservatives that their political opponents cared nothing for the opinions and circumstances of ordinary Americans. Perot thus linked his distaste for Lin's design with partisan politics. This connection would become stronger during the construction process, although all one hundred Senators had co-sponsored the memorial and the VVMF leaders who supported the wall, particularly Jack Wheeler, were decidedly conservative.

Cautious approval for the design characterized much of the media's coverage of the competition. Architecture critic Wolf Von Eckardt called the design "eloquently understated" and a "direct evocation of an emotional experience." Once one understood Lin's design, it was "hard to imagine any better solution to the problems a Vietnam Veterans Memorial pose[d]."[41] The *New York Times* deemed it "a lasting and appropriate image of dignity and sadness," explaining that a traditional monument would have been less fitting because "ideas about heroism…[were] no longer what they were before Vietnam."[42] However, this endorsement of the design, which linked the memorial not to vets but to the conflict as a whole, reflected precisely the uncertainty about the meanings of heroism that design opponents feared.

The announcement of the winning entry encouraged public support for and contributions to the project, as the VVMF's board members had hoped it would. An Ohio couple wrote: "Recognition for [Vietnam veterans'] efforts is long past due. We are so sorry that they never

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accommodate a range of interpretations, made it an appropriate memorial to accommodate the range of views Americans have about Vietnam—except for the views of those who object to that very openness." Hagopian, 333.

[41] Wolf Von Eckardt, "Storm Over A Vietnam Memorial," *Time*, 9 November 1981, 103; Wolf Von Eckardt, "Of Heart and Mind: The Serene Grace of the Vietnam Memorial," *Washington Post*, 16 May 1981, B1, B4.

[42] "Remembering Vietnam," *New York Times*, 18 May 1981, A18.

received a great big 'Thank You' and a hearty 'Welcome Home' that they so richly deserved."[43] Their letter, which expressed support for the project without commenting on the design, was representative of many that the VVMF received. Donations came from unexpected sources, including one from a man imprisoned and thus ineligible for the draft during the war. He was homeless and had no steady source of income, but sent ten dollars to the VVMF. The accompanying letter, which revealed his view of the design as an affirmation of vets' valor, read: "I kind of wish I was one of them being recognized 'at last' as a hero. It should feel good."[44] Traditional veterans' organizations also moved quickly to support the VVMF's fundraising efforts.[45]

However, many others, especially in the conservative press, denounced the design. The *National Review* dubbed the proposed monument "Orwellian glop," objecting that the "V" formed by the walls resembled a peace sign, the "invisibility of the monument at ground level symbolize[d] the 'unmentionability' of the war," and that listing the names of the dead rendered them "individual deaths, not deaths in a cause."[46] The "rude and ugly" memorial, according to another scathing editorial, was like a "black stone sarcophagus…like spitting on [servicemen's]

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[43] Letter from Wayne and Buena Buckner to the VVMF, 26 May 1981, Box 74, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[44] Letter from Vincent Wolf to the VVMF, 11 May 1981, Box 74, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[45] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 71-72. See also Scott, *Vietnam Veterans Since the War*, 177. The VFW and American Legion, in particular, contributed generously to the project. Some scholars have thus concluded that the memorial encouraged cooperation among vets. However, as I discuss in Chapter 4, the VFW and American Legion began to court Vietnam veterans in the 1970s, after their leaders determined that an influx of younger vets would revitalize their organizations. However, Vietnam vets' groups like VVAW often eyed the memorial with considerable skepticism. See Nicosia, *Home To War,* 493.

[46] "Stop that Monument," *National Review*, 18 September 1981, 1064.

graves." The monument failed to acknowledge the "honorable" deaths of soldiers in Vietnam and conflated veterans and the war.[47] The editors of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine campaigned vigorously against the "architectural apology" for the war, and vets responded enthusiastically.[48] The writer Tom Wolfe echoed Perot's accusation that the design was elitist.[49] Veterans critical of the design feared that a public dispute would reinforce stereotypes of their aggressive tendencies. Yet they were even more concerned that the design, if left unchanged, would cement the impression that vets' service in Vietnam had been less than honorable.[50] Vets called the monument "an open mass grave," a "cruel joke," and a "hole to jump into like when we used to hide from 122mm rockets."[51] Many suspected that a different entry would have won had there been a Vietnam vet on the jury.[52]

These comments reflected the most common critiques of the memorial, which focused on what many opponents of Lin's design considered its funereal elements. They noted that it would be black, the color of mourning, rather than white, the more celebratory color of most monuments in Washington. Moreover, it would be horizontal rather than vertical, which they suggested would lend it a subdued appearance; the memorial, to be set below ground level, was

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[47] "A Monumental Insult to Veterans," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 January 1982, A16.

[48] "Vietnam Veterans Memorial: The Gash in the Ground," *Soldier of Fortune*, March 1982, 26.

[49] Tom Wolfe, "Art Disputes War: The Battle of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Washington Post*, 13 October 1982, B1, B3.

[50] Milt Copulos, "Background to Betrayal: Viet Vets Want Their Memorial Back," *Soldier of Fortune*, May 1983, 19.

[51] "Flak," *Soldier of Fortune*, July 1982, 8, 91. Quotes are from letters from Pamela Lacey, Bert Madison, and Thomas M. Cooney.

[52] See, for example, the letter from Robert C. Lorbeer to the *Washington Post*, *Washington Post*, 16 May 1981, A12 and Tom Carhart, "Insulting Vietnam Vets," *New York Times*, 24 October 1981, 23.

often compared to a grave. The design also lacked patriotic elements such as an American flag. The list of names, too, drew scorn. Because they would be listed according to date of death, rather than in alphabetical order, vets complained that visitors would have difficulty locating the names of friends and loved ones. Furthermore, many objected to the list itself, though the VVMF's competition guidelines had dictated that all entries must list the names of the dead. Many, including Tom Carhart, had proposed a statue or other central commemorative element for the memorial, for which white walls listing the names would serve as a backdrop. Lin's wall, however, deliberately drew attention to the names in a way that seemed to some veterans to honor those who died while failing to acknowledge living veterans. [53]

Opponents of the design were determined to amend it. Before construction could begin, the memorial needed approval by the national Fine Arts Commission. At a committee meeting ostensibly devoted to routine construction details, Carhart decided to make a dramatic gesture. He arrived at the session with his two Purple Hearts pinned to his lapel and derided the proposed monument as an "anti-heroic…black gash of shame and sorrow hacked into the national visage that is the Mall."[54] Scruggs, encountering Carhart on his way out of the meeting, asked, "Where'd you learn to be a traitor? You learn that at West Point?"[55] At the conclusion of the meeting, the Fine Arts Commission reaffirmed its decision to proceed with construction, but Carhart's speech was widely quoted in the media. Webb, who was almost as unhappy as Carhart, resigned from the National Sponsoring Committee when he realized that the VVMF

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[53] Letters from Robert C. Lorbeer and Timothy J. Vogel to the *Washington Post*, *Washington Post*, 16 May 1981, A12.

[54] Tom Carhart, "Insulting Vietnam Vets," *New York Times*, 24 October 1981, 23. See also Atkinson, 470.

[55] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 471.

intended to stand by Lin's design, and commented that the acrimony made him feel as though the vets were "throwing Purple Hearts at each other."[56]

Given their goal of affirming the heroism and importance of service in Vietnam, it is ironic that VVMF leaders often disparaged one another's military backgrounds. In his question about whether West Point had taught Carhart to be a traitor, Scruggs used his knowledge that Carhart took great pride in his status as a West Point alumnus to attack him. The comment also reflected Scruggs's status as a former enlisted man, and thus an outsider within the VVMF. The memorial had been his idea, but he was not part of the elite military network equipped to launch the VVMF after its early fundraising failures.[57] Scruggs's question was not the first instance of such rhetoric. A miscommunication about when and how to introduce the memorial legislation in Congress had led to an argument between Webb and Wheeler. In an angry phone call, Wheeler told Webb, "We have to coordinate what we're doing….that's basic first-year tactics at either of our academies." His comment enraged Webb, who felt that "the last thing he needed was this Long Binh West Pointer lecturing him on tactics."[58] The longstanding rivalry between West Point and Webb's alma mater, the Naval Academy, may partly explain Webb's reaction. However, his response also demonstrated Webb's disdain for Wheeler's Vietnam service, which had been on the U.S. base in Long Binh, not in combat. Indeed, Webb was not the only one who thought that service in combat lent credibility. Board member Art Mosley had first invited

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[56] Ibid., 472.

[57] While Scruggs had, indeed, been an enlisted man, not an officer like other VVMF members, he sometimes exaggerated his outsider status. Before founding the VVMF, he had researched and testified before Congress on the subject of vets' readjustment problems. Hagopian, *Social Memory of the Vietnam War*, 286-87.

[58] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 454-455. See p. 7, n. 14, for details of the misunderstanding that led to this exchange.

Carhart to join the VVMF because he "was bothered that of the inner circle running the VVMF, only Scruggs was a genuine combat vet."[59]

Moreover, both supporters and opponents of the design worried that a very public disagreement would reinforce negative perceptions of vets. In a *Washington Post* essay calling for a "few cosmetic alterations" to Lin's design—including making the memorial white and bringing the walls aboveground—Tom Carhart felt the need to explain that the dispute was not "just another case of self-pitying Vietnam veterans whining and whimpering and wallowing in *Weltschmerz*." On the contrary, he asserted: "*I* feel no sorrow. I regret the deaths of brothers in arms, but they died noble, principled deaths, and I salute them and honor them. I am *proud* of our service to America, not sorry for it."[60] A former Marine captain, Robert J. Brugger, went a step further, suggesting that the entire movement to build a memorial only encouraged stereotypes of vets "betray[ed] weakness and suggest[ed] folly." He believed Lin's plan might send a "message of muted bravado" and cause Americans to remember a "war of doubtful ends and horrendous means." Brugger could think of no reason for vets to advocate a monument other than those that suggested self-pity. He asked: "Did we choose to serve because we felt duty-bound? Then presumably we should settle for the satisfaction of duty fulfilled. Did we go unthinkingly, not knowing any better? Then we might be thankful for the lesson the experience forced upon us…Did we go for the hell of it? Then we got what we deserved."[61]

The conservative campaign against Lin's proposal captured the attention of James Watt, Reagan's right-leaning Secretary of the Interior, who forced the VVMF to make concessions to

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[59] Ibid., 458.

[60] Tom Carhart, "A Better Way to Honor Viet Vets," *Washington Post*, 15 November 1981, C5.

[61] Robert J. Brugger, "The Dedication" [Letters to the Editor], *New York Times*, 17 November 1982, A18.

the design's opponents.[62] On January 4, 1982, Watt abruptly ordered a halt to all construction on the Mall, including work on the Vietnam monument, and made it clear that construction would not resume until critics of the design had been satisfied. VVMF supporter Senator John Warner thus proposed that the factions meet to work out the terms of a compromise. After a discussion that lasted many hours, during which tempers flared repeatedly, they finally brokered an agreement. A figurative statue, inscription, and American flag would be added to the design.[63]

The Fund, ever eager to downplay media coverage that might reflect negatively on vets, moved quickly to quiet the dispute. The day after the meeting with Warner, Scruggs announced the terms of their agreement on *Good Morning America.* A statue, to be selected from the sculptures entered in the original competition, would be placed near the wall. Four men, all of them vets, would serve on the selection committee: James Webb; VVMF board member Art Mosley; William Jayne, the national deputy director of the VVLP; and Milton Copulos, a journalist who opposed Lin's design.[64] The sculpture they selected had appealed to the first competition's jury, too; it had come in third in the original contest. The statue, *The Three Fightingmen*, would be a life-sized representation of three men in combat fatigues. (See Figure

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[62] For more on Watt's politics, see Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and C. Brant Short, *Ronald Reagan and the Public Lands: America's Conservation Debate, 1979-1984* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1989).

[63] Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 99-101. General Mike Davison, who was superintendent at West Point while Wheeler and Carhart were cadets, was largely responsible for the agreement.

[64] "Statement of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Regarding the Compromise Agreement," 14 December 1982, Box 35, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. For a lengthy article by Copulos on the design, see Milt Copulos, "Background to Betrayal: Viet Vets Want Their Memorial Back," *Soldier of Fortune*, May 1983, 18-21, 85-88.

7.)[65] Those who favored a heroic monument were especially pleased that its creator, the artist Frederick Hart, had apprenticed under the sculptor of the celebratory Iwo Jima Memorial.

Figure 7

Though the VVMF had hoped that the agreement would silence the controversy, an "art war" developed as Lin and Hart began to criticize one another's designs. The statue, Lin said, was "trite." She accused Hart of "drawing mustaches on other people's portraits."[66] Hart's retort summed up the concerns of many who had objected to Lin's resistance to embedding a triumphal narrative in her design. He countered with a description of the wall as "nihilistic" and warned: "People say you can bring what you want to Lin's memorial. But I call that brown bag

[65] The photo of the statue, taken by Neeshan Natalchayan, is from Scruggs and Swerdlow.

[66] "An Interview With Maya Lin," in Elizabeth Hess, "A Tale of Two Memorials," *Art in America*, April 1983, 123; Rick Horowitz, "Maya Lin's Angry Objections," *Washington Post*, 7 July 1982, B1.

aesthetics. I mean you'd better bring something, because there ain't nothing being served." He complained that Lin played an "ingénue" in order to win public support.[67]

Indeed, opponents of the design made much of Lin's status as a young Chinese-American woman.[68] Her detractors argued that Lin was not old enough to remember the war, let alone understand its significance, and had "admitted that she ha[d] read little about Vietnam.[69] They often ignored the fact that Hart, though older than Lin, had not served in the military, and had, in fact, opposed the war. Moreover, some vets thought Lin's ethnicity rendered her an inappropriate choice to design a memorial for a war fought in Asia. Although Lin was born in Ohio, one vet complained to the Fund, "I consider it a further insult that the design was made by a gook!"[70] According to the VVMF, Carhart, too, suggested that "designed by a gook" would be an appropriate inscription for the wall.[71] The press, even if inclined to support Lin's design, often struck a bemused or condescending tone in articles that mentioned the artist. One reporter noted approvingly that, despite her "youth and inexperience," Lin was "taking it all in stride, pleased and enjoying herself."[72] Another characterized Lin as "the scion of…one of China's

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[67] "An Interview With Frederick Hart," in Elizabeth Hess, "A Tale of Two Memorials," *Art in America*, April 1983, 124.

[68] When the issue was raised, Hart claimed that he "got gassed with everyone else mostly out of peer pressure." See "An Interview with Frederick Hart" in Hess, "A Tale of Two Memorials," 124.

[69] Bob Poos, "Bulletin Board," *Soldier of Fortune*, August 1982, 8.

[70] Letter from Richard A. Hooks to Jimmy Stewart and Jan Scruggs, 21 July 1981, Box 75, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[71] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 469.

[72] B Drummond Ayres, Jr., "A Yale Senior, a Vietnam Memorial, and a Few Ironies," *New York Times*, 29 June 1981, B5.

most remarkable literary, artistic, and political families."[73] Lin did little to discourage these attitudes, and freely admitted, "Vietnam was something I only remember as a child. There's no particular great issue about it for me." She also drew attention to her status as a Yale undergraduate, and refused to dress in a manner appropriate for conservatively attired Washington circles. She relished the fact that the professor for her funerary architecture course, who gave her design a "B" when she submitted it as a class assignment, had entered—and lost—the memorial competition.[74]

These portrayals of Lin were a source of some consternation among members of the VVMF, who feared that their own image would suffer in comparison. Lin's relationship with the VVMF soured after the board decided to permit changes to her design. A Fund memo cautioned that, regardless of the organization's disagreements with Lin, they needed to maintain the appearance of a "friendly bond" in order to discourage the "false stereotype of Vietnam veterans (the VVMF) as mean, crazed fiends running around in their fatigues…being mean to sweet little girls."[75] Lin, however, argued that VVMF leaders thought they could bully her precisely because she was a young woman. She said that she had been unable to prevent the addition of a statue because she had "no power—no masculinity." Lin told a reporter: "The fund has always seen me as female—as a child. I went in there when I first won and their attitude was—O.K. you did a good job, but now we're going to hire some big boys—boys—to take care of it."[76]

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[73] Phil McCombs, "Maya Lin and the Great Call of China," *Washington Post*, 3 January 1982, F1.

[74] Ayres, "A Yale Senior, a Vietnam Memorial, and a Few Ironies.".

[75] Note on a letter from Bob Carter to Maya Lin, 17 August 1982, Box 33, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[76] "An Interview With Maya Lin," in Hess, "A Tale of Two Memorials," 123.

Similar concerns about gender suffused discussions about the memorial itself. Hart's statue drew fire from women veterans for its omission of a female figure. Lin's wall listed the names of the eight women killed in Vietnam, but the sculpture, women vets argued, was not inclusive.[77] In addition to critics' claims that Lin's design was "anti-heroic," Carhart had often referred to it as a "tribute to Jane Fonda."[78] Lin confirmed their fears; she said during an interview that it had "a female sensibility," at least in "a world of phallic memorials that rise upwards."[79] Indeed, during a press conference, Jim Webb was explicit about his hope that the Vietnam memorial would convey an image of militarized masculinity similar to that of the Washington Monument. He declared: "When you [see] the white phallus that is the Washington Monument piercing the air like a bayonet, you feel uplifted."[80]

Hart's statue corresponded with the masculine sensibilities of many vets, but the oddly calculated ethnicities of the soldiers it depicted provoked criticism. One figure was white, one African-American. VVMF explanations of the ethnicity of the third changed depending on the audience to which they hoped to appeal. Velma Montoya of the American G.I. Forum, a Latino veterans' group, believed that the third soldier would be "Hispanic in appearance," though this was little-known, and suggested that the Reagan administration "could get a lot of mileage"

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[77] Hagopian, *Social Memory of the Vietnam War*, 334-35. A statue depicting women, dedicated in 1993, was eventually added to the memorial.

[78] Tom Wolfe, "Art Disputes War: The Battle of the Vietnam Memorial," *Washington Post*, 13 October 1982, B1. Carhart, like many Vietnam vets, had a particular distaste for Fonda as a result of her protests against the war. In 1983, he wrote that those who bought her exercise videos "should bear in mind that the money you pay will be used in an effort to bring about the downfall of the American way of life." Tom Carhart, "Jane Fonda: From Hollywood to Hanoi and Back," *Soldier of Fortune*, March 1983, 90.

[79] "An Interview With Maya Lin," in Hess, "A Tale of Two Memorials."

[80] "Remarks of James Webb, Press Conference of 4 November 1982," reproduced from Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund files, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, at http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/vietnam/r4/1982/ (accessed 4 December 2008).

among Latino voters by drawing attention to this.[81] Robert A. Carter of the VVMF declared that one of the figures would be "representative of Hispanics."[82] Yet when Congressman Norman Y. Mineta wrote to the VVMF to confirm that the figures would be Latino, African-American, and Caucasian, and to ask why there would be no Asian-American serviceman, Jan Scruggs told him that the third figure was "considered to be representative of all the minorities who participated in the Vietnam war."[83] One article dismissed questions about Hart's representations by describing the statue as a "memorial to two muggers and one muggee."[84]

The statue agreement thus failed to end the clash over the memorial. The VVMF had planned a "National Salute to Vietnam Veterans" for Veterans Day 1982. Since Watt's stop-work order had been lifted, rapid progress had been made on the wall, and they planned to dedicate the memorial at the same time. Webb, Carhart, and Perot, however, were adamantly opposed to this plan. They argued that there couldn't be a dedication ceremony until the memorial was complete, and that wouldn't happen until the statue was in place. The VVMF, however, planned to "sneak in a ceremony."[85] (See Figures 8 and 9 for pictures of the completed wall.)[86]

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[81] Memo from Velma Montoya to James A. Baker III, Michael Deaver, and Edwin Meese III, 11 July 1983, Casefile 152139, SP 790, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[82] Letter from Robert A. Carter to EEOC Commissioner Tony E. Gallegos, 7 July 1983, Casefile 152139, SP 790, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[83] Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to Congressman Norman Y. Mineta, 3 August 1984, Box 35, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[84] Peter Blake and Thomas Walton, "Monument City: The Best and Worst Public Monuments in Washington, D.C." *Connoisseur*, June 1984, 91.

[85] "VVMF Call Report," 18 May 1982, Box 35, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[86] The pictures, by Hank Savage, appear in Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 13, 117.

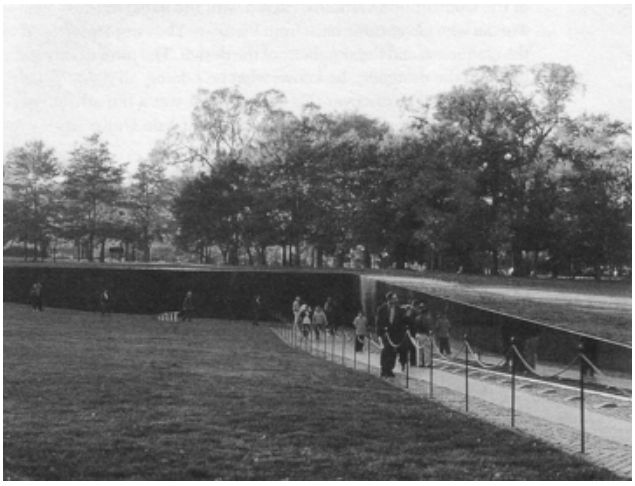

Figure 8

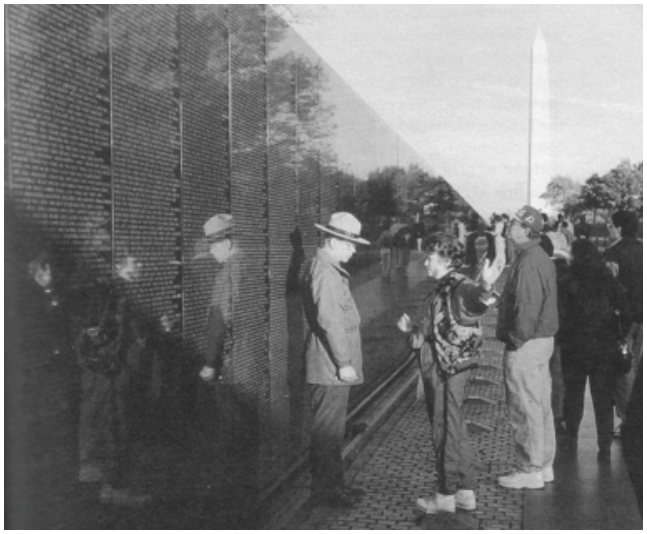

Figure 9

Tensions surrounding the National Salute escalated when, a few weeks before the event, the television program *60 Minutes* aired a segment on the memorial that featured Tom Carhart. He had renewed his attack on Lin's design, calling it a "black sarcophagus" and declaring that the "license of Congress [was] to honor and recognize those who served in Vietnam, not Jane

Fonda and her friends."[87] Wheeler, meanwhile, had enraged Webb and Carhart by asking the Episcopal Church of America for a proclamation of "reconciliation" intended to bring together vets, draft evaders, and antiwar protesters.[88] Wheeler's decision to abandon partisanship threatened to undercut the political gains of the VVLP and conservative vets.

A program that aired on WDVM, the Washington-area CBS affiliate, in November 1983 caused hostilities to peak. For some months, Perot had been demanding an independent audit of the VVMF's books. Carlton Sherwood, an investigative reporter, had researched a series in which he insinuated that the VVMF was guilty of financial impropriety.[89] He implied this was in keeping with the character of its leadership and claimed that John Wheeler had been the subject of disciplinary action while in Vietnam and cited for "conduct totally unbecoming an officer." The VVMF rebutted the allegations, but the reports drew the attention of the General Accounting Office, which conducted an audit. The Fund was subsequently cleared of financial impropriety, WDVM apologized for the series, and Sherwood resigned.[90]

The WDVM series, however, led to a round of vicious attacks intended to cast doubts on opponents' manhood and Vietnam-era service that revealed deep fissures in the ideal of militarized masculinity promoted by the VVLP. These accusations were prompted largely by VVMF fears that their reputation had been permanently damaged. Scruggs called Webb a

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[87] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line,* 480.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Phil McCombs, "Battle of the Wall," *Washington Post*, 8 November 1983, D1.

[90] John Carmody, "Channel 9 Apologizes to Fund," *Washington Post*, 8 November 1984, D1; John Carmody, "The TV Column," *Washington Post*, 8 December 1983, 20. His resignation notwithstanding, Sherwood retained a belief in the efficacy of denouncing the Vietnam-era service of his olitical opponents. In 2004, he, along with several former VVLP members, produced the "Swift Boat ads" intended to derail Democrat John Kerry's presidential campaign.

"sissy"; Webb suggested that Scruggs was undeserving of the medal he had earned in Vietnam for valor.[91] And in a *Washington Post* interview, Webb referred to Wheeler and Scruggs as "pathetic creatures."[92] Carhart, meanwhile, stepped up his tendency to refer to Wheeler as "Mr. Vietnam Veteran" and "Sergeant Rock."[93]

The acrimony also highlighted the growing political divisions in the veterans movement. The VVMF, though by most standards a conservative organization, accused the right-leaning Perot of using "Joe McCarthy tactics" to "harass the Vietnam Veterans who succeeded where he failed."[94] Perot's attorney, Roy Cohn, a former assistant to Senator Joseph McCarthy, responded in kind with a suggestion that the design choice signaled Communist sympathies among the jury members. Jim Webb, who called the construction project "the screwiest things I've ever worked on," lamented the VVMF's characterization of him as "The Right Wing Freak." "I don't need to cry on your shoulder," he told writer Elisabeth Bumiller, "but it's no fun being called a right-wing McCarthyite. That's pretty rough stuff, particularly for a writer."[95] Notwithstanding Webb's perceptions of his own politics, however, his condemnations of Lin's design indicated his support for a conservative, military masculinity.[96]

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[91] Letter James Webb to Jan Scruggs, 29 November 1984, Box 32, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[92] Bumiller, "The Memorial, Mirror of Vietnam."

[93] Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 468.

[94] "VVMF Call Report," 25 February 1983, Box 30, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[95] Bumiller, "The Memorial, Mirror of Vietnam."

[96] In 1984, Reagan nominated Webb for the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. A *Washington Post* article on the nomination suggested that Webb's conservative beliefs about manhood and the military, particularly his opposition to women in combat roles, would likely be raised during his confirmation hearings. VVMF leaders were evidently not alone in seeing Webb's views as

Indeed, VVMF leaders saw their cause as an essentially conservative one, and viewed Reagan's election as a great boon to the project. In 1981, they speculated: "With the advent of a new administration…and a more conservative attitude toward many issues in the United States today, the political climate will most likely be favorable to the VVMF's national memorial project." In particular, the Fund expected that the "themes of patriotism, a strong national defense, and renewed pride in American traditions will help to sensitize the general population to whom we are appealing for funds; they will therefore be more receptive to dealing with a cause like ours."[97]

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Yet the Reagan administration was remarkably cautious in its interactions with the VVMF. The memorial offered what might have been an ideal opportunity for Reagan to reinforce the message that the U.S. had fought for a "noble cause" in Vietnam. However, the President was far more hesitant to lend support to the VVMF than to the VVLP. Despite the organizations' similar goals and overlap in leadership, Reagan's aides feared the political consequences of public involvement in a project as controversial as the memorial. Ignoring demands that he weigh in on the design dispute, and media criticism of his apparent indifference to the monument, Reagan avoided involvement in the project for much of his first term. Yet the administration recognized the potential political payoff of the memorial, closely monitored its

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especially conservative. See Fred Hiatt and Rick Atkinson, "Much-Decorated War Novelist Chosen for Pentagon Position," *Washington Post*, 23 February 1984, A17.

[97] "1. Political…" [untitled VVMF internal memo, 1981], Folder 4, Box 3, David DeChant Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

progress, and worked behind the scenes to influence the design and silence the debate about it. By 1984, it was clear that the project was a success; Reagan promptly appropriated the memorial as a symbol of national unity.

In 1981, Patrick Buchanan, a political commentator and Reagan's future communications director, noted affinities between design opponents and the White House and suggested that the public make "urgent appeals to Congress and, especially, President Reagan, whose Secretary of the Interior must approve the digging." Buchanan, like other critics, observed that there was no Vietnam vet on the jury that named Lin the contest winner. Instead, the panel was comprised of "several members outspokenly hostile to the national effort to stop North Vietnam's conquest of the South; one member allegedly had a long association with the American Communist Party."[98] Buchanan's suggestion that the design selection suffered from Communist influence capitalized on Reagan's strident anti-Communist rhetoric.

Vets lobbied the Reagan administration to intercede, appealing to the themes of conservative, militarized masculinity invoked by the president and the VVLP. Thomas J. McGuire, a veteran of two tours in Vietnam, denounced the wall as a "long, cold, negative, passive tombstone." Its effect, he said, would be to "downgrade to a severe degree the heroic and dedicated patriotic service of [those who] served their country so well." He hoped that a new design would be selected, one which would "represent action, include the Flag, and be a Monument that will endure and reflect pride and dignity to future generations. The Monument should represent the finest of our society who served in Vietnam and not the very small number

[98] Quoted in Hagopian, *Social Memory of the Vietnam War*, 306 n. 37.

represented by the media and the story tellers."[99] Another letter expanded on the partisan politics to which McGuire alluded. Army combat vet Frederick R. Daly denounced the proposed monument as "another example of liberal 'whiners' who insist on using any symbolism possible to denigrate the Armed Forces and their role during the Vietnam war….I hope and pray that a conservative, pro-American administration does not allow this travesty to become a reality."[100]

Republicans in the House of Representatives similarly endeavored to persuade Reagan that Lin's memorial would make a political statement detrimental to their shared conservative agenda. Rep. Henry J. Hyde of Illinois penned a letter signed by 31 Congressmen that explained: "We feel this design makes a political statement of shame and dishonor, rather than pride at the courage, patriotism, and nobility of all who served. A jury ought to be appointed, one less intent on perpetuating national humiliation…[We] fervently hope you and Secretary Watt will intercede to prevent this depressing and unedifying memorial from representing our Nation's public statement about men and women who deserve better from us."[101] David O'Brien Martin, a Vietnam vet and representative from New York, argued that the monument would contravene Congress's authorization for a memorial "in honor and recognition of" veterans. As a former serviceman, he said, he was "personally offended" by the design. He continued: "As an American citizen, I protest this attempt to dishonor with a brazen political statement the

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[99] Letter from Thomas J. McGuire to Ronald Reagan, 11 December 1981, Casefile 052363, PA 002, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[100] Letter from Frederick R. Daly to Mike Deaver, 25 November 1981, Casefile 051450, PA 002, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[101] Letter from Henry J. Hyde, et al, to Ronald Reagan, 12 January 1982, Folder: "Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Box 14, Series II: Subject File, James W. Cicconi Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

dedication and patriotism of those whose sense of duty transcended politics."[102] Ohio Congressman John M. Ashbrook echoed these sentiments and noted the project's likely influence on views of the war and of the military. Ashbrook suggested: "[R]equesting plans for a new Vietnam Veterans Memorial will help redirect the nation's view of that war and its meaning. It will assist in instilling the belief in our youth that fighting for freedom is indeed a high calling for an American."[103]

The administration, however, endeavored to remain above the fray, despite private doubts about Lin's design. James Watt's decision to halt construction had prompted the Congressmen to write. Reagan had not commented publicly on Watt's actions, and press accounts suggested that Watt had acted on his own initiative. Indeed, Watt believed that it would be "a sad day when 'artistic freedom' control[led] what America should stand for," but the Secretary of the Interior had, in fact, requested White House guidance on how to proceed. After a careful consideration of the politics of the dispute, the administration advised him to encourage the two sides to find a compromise, using "threats of non-approval" if necessary. A sense that proceeding with a "memorial which is taken as offensive by most of those it is designed to honor [was] both futile and unseemly," as well as a suspicion that "honoring the wishes or persons of the Vietnam veterans themselves was very far from the minds of the VVMF leadership," informed the White House's decision.[104]

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[102] Letter from David O'B. Martin to the President, 18 January 1982, Folder: "Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Box 14, Series II: Subject File, James W. Cicconi Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[103] Letter from John M. Ashbrook to Ronald W. Reagan, 27 January 1982, Folder: "Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Box 14, Series II: Subject File, James W. Cicconi Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[104] Memo from Danny Boggs to Martin Anderson, 18 January 1982, Folder: "Natural Resources—Parks—Vietnam Memorial," Box OA 11961, Danny Boggs Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

The administration especially feared making a statement that would alienate prominent conservatives or permanently derail the memorial. Republican opinion on the issue seemed divided. Though Reagan's allies in the House opposed the design, other important conservatives supported the VVMF, including General William Westmoreland, entertainer Bob Hope, and *Washington Post* columnist James J. Kilpatrick. White House aides believed that "considerable political discontent" would result if Lin's plan remained unchanged. Yet instructing the Park Service to disapprove the design might force Reagan to publicly express an opinion on it, and could also "kill any national memorial for many years or forever."[105]

The ensuing instructions to Watt to seek a compromise resulted in the statue agreement, an outcome the White House found most satisfactory. In August 1982, Special Assistant to the President Morton Blackwell reported to Elizabeth Dole, his colleague in the Office of Public Liasion, that Hart's figurative statue was "outstanding." Blackwell noted that it "include[d] the first black soldier to be represented in any U.S. war memorial. It is a very clearcut, straightforward, and moving representation, without being pugnacious." He reported that one of his drivers, a Vietnam vet, agreed with his assessment of the statue as a "winner."[106]

In 1983, another dispute, this time over the locations of the statue and flag, again threatened to involve Reagan. In the administration's estimation, the objections of Perot and his allies to the proposed sites for the statue and flag were an excuse to "refight the original design controversy." Anxious that they "would not be lucky enough to sidestep it a second time," the

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[105] Memo from Danny Boggs to Martin Anderson, 18 January 1982, Folder: "Natural Resources—Parks—Vietnam Memorial," Box OA 11961, Danny Boggs Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[106] Memo from Morton C. Blackwell to Elizabeth Dole, 24 August 1982, Folder: "Veterans August-December 1982 [4 of 7], Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

White House sought to make a decision on the placement of the additions to the memorial and thus forestall further tension.[107] The administration hoped that another compromise—deferring to the Fine Arts Commission—would allow Reagan to evade the issue again. Aides believed this approach would "comfortably insulate [Reagan] from those who may have their own fish to fry. The final choice will certainly draw criticism. What is important is that neither the President or the Administration get caught in the crossfire."[108]

Reagan maintained his public silence on the memorial because of its potential to undermine his efforts to unite Americans around the idea of Vietnam as a "noble cause." As the VVMF had discovered, a project intended to encourage consensus on the war in Vietnam had precisely the opposite effect. The administration calculated that the 1982 dedication "was a real success and 'healed the wounds,'" and hesitated to "even directly abet a reopening of them" by expressing an opinion on the placement of the statue and flag.[109]

White House triangulation on the issue extended to a decision that Reagan should avoid the 1982 dedication of the Wall. An aide had initially suggested that the President and his wife serve as honorary co-chairs of the festivites, a sentiment echoed in several letters from members of Congress. Elizabeth Dole noted that First Lady Nancy Reagan had served on the VVMF's National Sponsoring Committee, and that the Reagans' failure to make an appearance would

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[107] Memo from Jim Cicconi to Craig Fuller, 5 January 1983, Folder: "Veterans—January 1983 [1 of 2]," Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[108] Memo from Elizabeth H. Dole to Edwin A. Meese III, James A. Baker III, and Michael K. Deaver, 20 January 1983, Folder: "Veterans January 1983 [2 of 2]," Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[109] Memo from Jim Cicconi to Craig Fuller, 5 January 1983, Folder: "Veterans—January 1983 [1 of 2]," Box OA 4539, Series I: Subject File, Elizabeth Dole Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

invite criticism.[110] Yet the President and First Lady stayed away from the National Salute, presumably due to the tensions swirling around the question of whether the monument could be considered "finished" before Hart's statue was in place. Reagan continued to sidestep all questions about the memorial. Moreover, he suggested that his staff, not he, made all decisions regarding his administration's support for the project. When a reporter asked whether he planned to visit the memorial, he responded: "I can't tell until somebody tells me. I never know where I'm going."[111] Just two days before the dedication, a spokesman for the Veterans Administration claimed that it was unclear whether the President would attend.[112]

Reagan finally visited in May of 1983, when much of the controversy had died down. After attending a Sunday morning service with Chief of Staff James A. Baker and his family, Reagan made an unscheduled stop on the Mall as he returned to the White House. A White House spokesman explained that Reagan had long hoped to see the memorial "and it just worked out today." At the Wall, the President spoke briefly with other visitors and paid his respects to the war's dead. According to one reporter, he also "responded in kind to a salute from a man clad in military fatigues and accepted a 'POW-MIA' T-shirt from a member of a veterans' group keeping vigil at the site."[113]

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[110] Memo Elizabeth H. Dole to Michael Deaver, 3 August 1982, Folder: "National Salute to Vietnam Veterans," Box OA 9078, Morton Blackwell Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. In 1982, with tempers over the design running high, the First Lady quietly resigned her VVMF position.

[111] Lou Cannon, "White House Team No Longer Pullin Together in the Traces," *Washington Post*, 15 November 1982, A3.

[112] Kenneth Bredemeir, "Preparations for Salute to Vietnam Veterans Nearly Done," *Washington* Post, 9 November 1982, B1.

[113] "President Goes to Church, Visits the Vietnam Memorial," *Washington Post*, 2 May 1983, A1.

On Memorial Day in 1984, the remains of a serviceman who fought in Vietnam were interred in the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. Many Vietnam veterans and President Reagan celebrated the event, which they saw as yet another victory in their campaign to cure the Vietnam syndrome.[114] In a ten-minute speech at the Tomb, Reagan referred to the war as a "noble cause" three times.[115] Three days earlier, in an address in the Capitol Rotunda, where the body of the Unknown Soldier lay in state, the President explained the lessons that the "honest patriotism" of this "American hero" offered. "He is the heart, the spirit, and the soul of America….we understand the meaning of his sacrifice and those of his comrades yet to return," Reagan explained. Moreover, the soldier's sacrifices offered guidance for the future: "Our path must be worthy of his trust. And we must not betray his love of country. It's up to us to protect the proud heritage now in our hands, and to live in peace as bravely as he died in war."[116]

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[114] The decision to bury the remains of the Vietnam Unknown was vigorously opposed by those in the POW/MIA movement, who demanded a "full accounting" of all servicemen killed or missing in Southeast Asia. Indeed, the Vietnam section of the tomb was completed in 1974. However, the movement's opposition, complications in identifying suitable remains, and the Nixon administration's reluctance to draw attention to the human costs of the ongoing conflict delayed the interment by a dozen years. The POW/MIA movement, too, represented a bid to shape the role of the war in American political culture. Yet Reagan, though usually sympathetic to their cause, proceeded with the ceremony, believing that the interment would bolster his reelection campaign and foreign policy agenda. See Allen, *The War's Not Over*, 477-491, 511-521. In 1998, DNA tests helped identify the remains in the Tomb of the Unknowns, which were subsequently disinterred. The crypt is now empty. For more on the pressure exerted by POW/MIA groups and their fear that interment would represent a symbolic end to the war, and thus divert attention from their cause, see: Memo from the Secretary of Defense to the President, 16 March 1984, Folder "POW?MIA—Tomb of the Unknown [2 of 4]," Box OA92409, Richard Childress Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[115] Allen, *The War's Not Over,* 478.

[116] "'Remarks of the President at Ceremony for Vietnam Unknown Soldier,' The Rotunda, The Capitol," 25 May 1984, Folder: "POW/MIA—Tomb of the Unknown [1 of 4]," Box OA92409, Richard Childress Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

On the advice of his aides, Reagan also used the occasion to give his imprimatur to the memorial, and thus to reinforce the connections he saw between foreign affairs and vets' image. The administration hoped that Reagan's acceptance of a VVMF invitation to stop by the monument and lay a wreath over the holiday weekend would be a "healing act" that would "silence the last remnants of the controversy that surrounded the design."[117] Indeed, Reagan's remarks at Arlington were largely devoted to living veterans and the dedication of the Memorial two years previously, which he described as a "stirring reminder of America's resilience, of how our nation could learn and grow and transcend the tragedies of the past." He reminded his audience that those who fought in Vietnam "were never defeated in battle and…were heroes as surely as any who have ever fought in a noble cause." The president ignored the debate over the design, arguing instead that the monument and the festivities accompanying its dedication had united the nation. "As America watched [the Vietnam veterans], some in wheelchairs, all of them proud," Reagan declared, "there was a feeling that this nation, as a nation, we were coming together again and that we had, at long last, welcomed the boys home." The story of a former Marine illustrated his point. During a trip to Washington to see the Wall, Herbie Pettit of New Orleans had gone out to dinner with some fellow ex-Marines. At the restaurant, Pettit and his friends had spoken with a group of college students, who rose from their seats and cheered the veterans at the end of the meal. This event, Reagan thought, showed how the memorial had helped change attitudes toward vets, and would ultimately put an end to questions about the

[117] Memo from Robert B. Kimmitt to Frederick J. Ryan, 22 May 1984, Folder "POW?MIA—Tomb of the Unknown [2 of 4]," Box OA92409, Richard Childress Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

meaning of the war. He concluded: "Let us, if we must, debate the lessons learned at some other time. Today, we simply say with pride, thank you, dear son."[118]

Though he had opted not to participate in the 1982 National Salute, Reagan spoke at the less politically divisive November 1984 dedication of Hart's statue, taking the opportunity to stress the importance—and heroic masculinity—of military service. He paid tribute to the heroism of those who "died uncomplaining. The tears staining their mud-caked faces were not for self-pity, but for the sorrow they knew the news of their deaths would cause their family and friends." Reagan, who occasionally seemed on the verge of tears himself, also honored living veterans, who, he said, "kept the faith. You walked from the litter, wiped away your tears, and returned to the battle. You fought on, sustained by one another and deaf to the voices of those who didn't comprehend. You performed with a steadfastness and valor that veterans of other wars salute…" The President emphasized that Hart's sculpture reflected the sense of common purpose shared by those who had fought in Vietnam. Moreover, he believed that unity was reflected in the role of the war in American political culture. "I believe that in the decade since Vietnam the healing has begun," he explained. "And I hope that before my days as Commander in Chief are over the process will be completed."[119]

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, in another 1984 Veterans Day speech, explained the importance of the post-Vietnam "healing" to a crowd of 5,000. After a few words

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[118] "'Remarks of the President at Memorial Day Ceremony Honoring Vietnam Unknown Soldier,' Arlington National Cemetery," 28 May 1984, Folder: "POW/MIA—Tomb of the Unknown [1 of 4]," Box OA92409, Richard Childress Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[119] Remarks of the President at Dedication of Vietnam Memorial Statue, November 11, 1984," press release dated 13 November 1984, Casefile 257200, SP 916, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. See also Arthur S. Brisbane, "Reconciliation Theme Voiced in Mall Ceremony," *Washington Post*, 12 November 1984, A1, A14.

of praise for women veterans, Weinberger asserted that the military's good reputation had been revived in the nine years since Vietnam. "There is one burden that young [active duty] Americans do not bear today," he told the assembled Vietnam vets. "They don't have to face the boos and the picket signs that so many of you had to face." Moreover, as the nation moved beyond the war, its lessons had become clear. Weinberger's explanation of one moral—"We must never again send Americans into battle unless we plan to win"—garnered a standing ovation.[120]

Other observers, too, believed that there was a natural congruence between the monument and the Reagan administration's approach to foreign affairs. Journalist William Greider described the President's defense spending and foreign policies as "another important memorial to the war in Indochina." Greider argued that the memorial was part of a broad process of "collective revisionism, widely shared by policy makers and the public," that endeavored to "blot out the disgrace of Saigon and the humiliating events in Iran." The "resurgence of bellicose rhetoric and the expensive preparations for war" were the White House's "revisionist statement about Vietnam. The humiliation of defeat, the bloody years of misguided adventurism, it did not happen. It was a noble cause."[121]

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[120] Arthur S. Brisbane, "Reconciliation Theme Voiced in Mall Ceremony," *Washington Post*, 12 November 1984, A14.

[121] William Greider, "Memories That Shape Our Futures," *Washington Post*, 8 November 1981, C1, C2.

Despite Reagan's hope that the process of "healing" would be complete by the time he left office, 87 percent of veterans who responded to a 1988 poll claimed that "the negative public image of veterans [was] a major issue for them."[122] The survey was conducted by the Vietnam Veterans Institute for Research and Advocacy (VVI), a Washington-based organization that sought, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to build on the efforts of the VVLP and VVMF to control vets' image. Indeed, the VVI, which was founded in 1981, was closely tied to the other two organizations. J. Eldon Yates, the Institute's Chairman of the Board, had held several leadership positions in the VVLP.[123] John Wheeler served on the VVI's Council of Scholars, while the VVMF's Robert Doubek served on the Institute board of directors.[124] Both Jan Scruggs and Jim Webb subscribed to the VVI newsletter.[125] The VVLP and VVI formally merged with one another in 1987.[126]

The Institute's leaders were strong supporters of the Reagan administration and its foreign policy initiatives, a position they tied to their insistence on maintaining the military as a masculine preserve. VVI chairman Jerry Yates campaigned vigorously against allowing women

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[122] Vietnam Veterans Institute Survey, September 1988, Folder 42, Box 2, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[123] J. Eldon Yates, Curriculum Vitae, Folder 14, Box 2, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech; Biographical Information, Jerry E. Yates, Director of Employment Programs & Service Organization Liaison, Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, Folder 14, Box 2, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech; "Performance Appraisal for non-Supervisory Employees," completed by Kenneth P. Moorefield [VVLP National Director], 6 July 1984, Folder 14, Box 2, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[124] "Board of Directors," Folder 3; and "Council of Scholars," Folder 7, Box 1, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[125] Renewal List, [n.d.], Folder 12, Box 1, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[126] Letter from Barry Caron to Eugene Gittelson, [undated], Folder 9, Box 1, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

to serve in combat roles, working closely with conservatives such as Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum, Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition, Beverly LaHaye of Concerned Women for America, and Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council.[127] He argued that though some women might be "that exception to the rule [who] can perform as well as some males in an infantry unit…one cannot build an army based on the exception." As evidence that women were ill-suited for combat, Yates observed: "It has been reported that the Air Force never takes women to MACH 1 in flight simulators because of the anatomical differences that will result in the loss of bladder control."[128] In 1988, Yates and other VVI leaders worked closely with Lt. Col. Oliver North's Defense Fund and expressed their support for Reagan's aggressive foreign policies even in the midst of the Iran-Contra scandal.[129]

The National Vietnam Veterans Coalition (NVVC), an umbrella organization formed in 1984, worked closely with the VVI to consolidate the political power of conservative veterans by attacking the liberal Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). The Coalition argued that the VVA promoted a negative image of former servicemen and that its "left-wing" stances did not represent most vets.[130] The VVA, moreover, was one of only two "Vietnam Veterans Organizations of substance" not affiliated with the Coalition. Thomas Burch, the national coordinator of the NVVC, explained that this was due largely to the VVA's foreign policy views,

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[127] Letter from Eldon "Jerry" Yates, et al, to Commissioner XXXXXX, 14 July 1992, Folder 21, Box 4, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[128] J. Eldon Yates, "The Summer of Our Discontent," *The Stars and Stripes*.

[129] Letter from J. Eldon Yates to Ms. Angie Branham, 23 November 1988, Folder 1, Box 2, Vietnam Veterans Instituye Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[130] "Vietnam Veterans of America: An Analysis," [n.d.], Folder: "Burch Collection (NVVC); Veteran Organization Files; Vietnam Veterans of America (Federal charter controversy), 1985-1987," Box 4, Veteran Organization Files, Burch (NVVC) Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

which he said were "inconsistent in regard to relations with Hanoi and on the POW issue with the vast majority of Vietnam veterans."[131] With the assistance of Senator Jeremiah Denton, the Coalition worked to undermine the VVA's application for a federal charter like those held by the VFW and American Legion. In a letter to his colleagues, Denton linked the VVA's foreign policy stances and the image of Vietnam vets. He asserted: VVA "activities appear to have been unwarranted interferences in the conduct of our foreign policy. Other activities have seemed to bring dishonor upon Americans who served our country well in Vietnam."[132]

The Coalition drew on the VVMF's fundraising abilities and ties to politically engaged veterans. In 1987, Burch asked Jan Scruggs to send a letter requesting donations to the NVVC to the VVMF's mailing list. The letter Burch envisioned would recognize the "fragmentation" of the veterans movement, but argue that the Memorial had obliterated those divisions. "With the unveiling of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Burch wrote, "After years of neglect and hostility from many of our fellow citizens, we finally were able to stand tall and proud."[133]

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[131] Letter from J. Thomas Burch to Sen. Jeremiah Denton, 8 November 1985, Folder: "Burch Collection (NVVC); Administrative Files, Correspondence, 1985," Box 1, Burch Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[132] Letter from Sen. Jeremiah Denton to Colleagues, 31 October 1985, Folder: "Burch Collection (NVVC); Veteran Organization Files; Vietnam Veterans of America (Federal charter controversy), 1985-1987," Box 4, Veteran Organization Files, Burch (NVVC) Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[133] Letter from J. Thomas Burch to Jan Scruggs, 17 March 1987, Folder: "Burch Collection (NVVC); Administrative Files, Publicity; NVVC Fundraising (Tobacco Inst.), 1988," Box 5, Burch (NVVC) Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

On the tenth anniversary of the memorial's dedication, Jan Scruggs once again declared that it had been a visible symbol of healing and recognition. He acknowledged, however: "Obviously, not all the wounds have healed in 10 years….In fact, we believe the anniversary represents a unique opportunity for the entire nation—once divided by Vietnam—to unite in remembrance and reflection." The program for the ceremony seemed to support Scruggs's view that the VVMF's work had created a sense of political unity. It featured endorsements of the monument from prominent figures across the political spectrum, from former presidential candidate George McGovern to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney.[134] Like the president's 1984 address, which used attitudes toward vets as a means of gauging opinions on the war itself, the tenth anniversary celebration was part of an ongoing discussion that transformed the debate over the memorial into a discussion of how Americans understood the war in Vietnam.

The VVMF's success in building the memorial indicated that concerns about vets' image had almost entirely superceded the movement for material benefits. Many Vietnam veterans were initially reluctant to support the project, fearing that it would drain resources from other veterans programs. VVLP and VVMF leaders had claimed that a focus on the image of vets would lead to the expansion of material benefits for them, a prediction that proved at least partially correct. A 1984 Veterans Administration brochure declared: "America owes recognition to its veterans for the leadership and patriotism they have brought back to their home communities and to our national institutions after answering the call to arms." Administrator Harry N. Walters explained that the VA served as "the tangible expression of the respect

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[134] Official Program, 10th Anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 6-11 November 1992, Folder: "Burch Collection (NVVC) Subject Files, VVMF—10th Anniversary," Box 10, Subject Files, Burch Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

Americans have traditionally shown the veterans who served and stood between America and her enemies."[135] The memorial had encouraged the recognition to which Walters referred.

Indeed, the monument suggested that Vietnam veterans had garnered a measure of recognition and support that exceeded that given veterans of earlier wars. Though Vietnam veterans had complained for more than a decade that they had not been properly welcomed home, no national memorial to vets of either the Second World War or the Korean War existed when the Wall was dedicated. Yet Vietnam vets seemed curiously unaware of this; they argued that the monument was needed to achieve parity with other former servicemen.

The memorial exacted considerable costs within the veterans community, ultimately undermining efforts to construct a singular understanding of their masculinity. VVMF supporters, including John Wheeler, believed that the rifts caused by the war were the cause of stereotypes about veterans. Therefore, encouraging Americans to set aside their differences over the war, and to unite behind the memorial, would encourage acceptance of the conflict's veterans. However, vets like Webb and Carhart demanded a less subtle approach to shaping veterans' images. They favored a heroic memorial that would unambiguously validate militarized masculinity. Though the disputants compromised on the memorial design, they were unable to reach a similar compromise on the politics of the veterans movement. The construction process sparked a highly partisan debate that ultimately consolidated a conservative coalition of vets, especially those of the VVI and NVVC, determined to oppose more moderate veterans organizations and to reinforce Reagan's efforts to lay the Vietnam syndrome to rest.

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[135] "The Year in Brief: The VA in 1984," [n.d.], Folder: "POW/MIA—Tomb of the Unknown," Box OA 92409, Richard Childress Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

More than a quarter of a century after its dedication, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial remains one of the most-visited monuments on the Mall in Washington, D.C. However, many visitors see only Maya Lin's famous wall of polished black granite inscribed with the names of American servicemen and women killed in Vietnam. They often do not notice—or perhaps do not realize the significance of—an American flag and a statue by the artist Frederick Hart, which is tucked into a small clearing near the Wall. Yet this statue is the product of years of acrimonious debate among Vietnam veterans about what form the memorial should take and what it would represent, a dispute that spoke to larger issues regarding the place of the war and its veterans in American society. The monument was the ultimate achievement and the effective undoing of a cohort of veterans intent on valorizing military service and constructing an image of "healthy masculinity." The inability of VVMF leaders to agree how to memorialize masculinity irreparably damaged the consensus they had struggled to build. The memorial's completion was framed by the press as a moment of healing. But beneath that fragile narrative, debates over vets' masculinity and the meaning of the war continued unabated.

Epilogue

Sergeant Seth Strasburg, a combat veteran who served in Iraq from 2003 to 2005, pled no contest to manslaughter charges and in September 2006 was sentenced to 22 to 36 years in prison. In 2005, on leave for the first time in two years, Strasburg spent New Year's Eve at a bar near his hometown of Arnold, Nebraska. After an "intense conversation" with a Vietnam veteran, Strasburg set off for a nearby party, where he became involved in an altercation with a young man named Thomas Varney. According to a bystander, Varney, who was sitting car with some friends, called Strasburg a "paid killer." Strasburg responded by reaching into the car and thrusting his gun under Varney's chin. During the subsequent struggle for control of the weapon, it went off, killing Varney. Strasburg fled the scene in his Jeep, and after the car went off the road, on foot, and finally into the woods wearing the bulletproof vest he always had with him. After Strasburg's sentencing hearing, his platoon leader, Captain Benjamin J. Tiffner, protested the length of his sentence. Tiffner explained: "Seth has been asked and required to do very violent things in defense of his country. He…solve[d] dangerous problems by using violence and the threat of violence as his main tools. He was congratulated and given awards for these actions. This builds in a person the propensity to deal with life's problems through violence and the threat of violence." Other observers shared similar concerns about the effects of combat on Strasburg. After the shooting, his mother started an organization meant to increase awareness of PTSD. The victim's father, however, dismissed such efforts as attempts to "excuse our son's death with the war." He bolstered his claim by suggesting that older veterans had not

suffered from PTSD: "His grandfather, my father, a lot of people been there, done that, and it didn't affect them."[1]

Strasburg's story was told in a January 2008 *New York Times* article, the first in a lengthy series titled "War Torn" that focused on killings committed by veterans of the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The series echoed the concerns often expressed three decades earlier about Vietnam vets' readjustment problems. Indeed, in mentioning that Strasburg spoke with a Vietnam veteran before setting off for the party where Varney died, the *New York Times* reinforced the image of Vietnam vets as agents of violence and linked veterans of recent wars to it. Strasburg's actions allegedly resulted from his combat training or experiences. He "did not easily shed the extreme vigilance that had become second nature. He traveled around rural Nebraska with a gun and body armor in his Jeep, feeling irritable, out of sorts and out of place in tranquil, 'American Idol'-obsessed America." Indeed, as in discussions of Vietnam vets, the allegedly transformative nature of service in combat was a recurring theme in the article. "'He came back different' is the shared refrain of the defendants' family members," its authors wrote. The *New York Times* series also raised questions about the role masculinity played in the violence, noting that of 121 known killings by veterans, only one was committed by a woman.[2] The problems of the current veteran population, the authors continued, might prove especially severe thanks to the "nature of the counterinsurgency war in Iraq, where there is no traditional

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[1] Deborah Sontag and Lizette Alvarez, "Across America, Deadly Echoes of Foreign Battles," *New York Times*, 13 January 2008, 1.

[2] Ibid. A similar story on Iraq war veterans, violence, and PTSD appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer. See Tom Infield, "Their War Comes Home," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 March 2008, 1.

front line," and to the extended tours of duty common among service members in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Similar arguments were, of course, made about the supposedly unprecedented problems of Vietnam veterans, especially the toll taken by an enemy engaged in guerrilla warfare. However, unlike most Vietnam era discussions of veterans, the authors did suggest continuities in the homecoming experiences of veterans, positing an "ancient connection" between combat duty and psychological issues.[3] Indeed, reports lamented the similarities between the experiences of Vietnam vets and those who served in the Middle East. The nation's newest veterans "were never supposed to suffer in the shadows the way veterans of the last, long controversial war did," according to the *Washington Post*. "One of the bitter legacies of Vietnam" was that policymakers failed to recognize and respond to PTSD until 1980, and "too many [vets] ended up homeless, alcoholic, drug-addicted, or dead before the government acknowledged their conditions."[4]

Both the Pentagon and veterans organizations attempted to discourage such reports. When asked to comment for the story, a spokesman for the Department of Defense "questioned the validity of comparing prewar and wartime numbers [of homicides] based on news media reports, saying that the current increase might be explained by 'an increase in awareness of military service by reporters since 9/11.'" In 2006, an article in a VFW magazine denounced the "wacko-vet myth" as the source of vets' unemployment problems.[5]

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[3] Sontag and Alvarez, "Across America."

[4] Dana Priest and Anne Hull, "The War Inside," *Washington Post*, 17 June 2007, A01. The *New York Times* series makes a similar claim. See Sontag and Alvarez, "Across America."

[5] Sontag and Alvarez, "Across America."

These responses, which parallel the arguments made by and about veterans in the late 1970s and 1980s, suggest that the success of efforts to rehabilitate Vietnam vets' image was at best uneven. The 2008 *New York Times* series closely resembled reports in the 1970s that claimed former servicemen had been "brutalized by battle" and represented a threat to civilian society.[6] Though organizations like the VVLP contributed to celebrations of the militarized masculinity endorsed by John Wheeler and Jim Webb in the 1980s, the consensus they built proved fragile. Wheeler and Webb sought to work together to construct a national memorial that would serve as a permanent reminder of the VVLP's message. The implosion of the VVMF undermined the VVLP's successes. Divisions within the veterans movement highlighted the limits of the politics of symbolism that aimed to define "healthy masculinity" and to position former servicemen as heroic warriors upon whom the future of the nation depended.

Yet Vietnam vets who aimed to reshape their image had an enduring impact on American political culture, though not in the way they intended. Disagreements regarding the meanings of masculinity that surfaced during the memorial controversy mobilized a cohort of veterans whose agenda colored American politics. Over the last two decades, several important political campaigns pivoted on issues deemed critically important by the leaders of the VVLP and VVMF. Indeed, the concerns of conservative Vietnam vets eclipsed those of liberal veterans groups and defined national debates regarding military service.

An understanding of this dynamic provides answers to questions posed by journalists about why servicemen returning from the Middle East did not receive proper treatment for PTSD. Liberal veterans groups insisted in the 1970s and '80s that proper screening and

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[6] The phrase "brutalized by battle" is from Reston, "A Land Fit for Heroes?"

treatment for PTSD should be a centerpiece of veterans programs, and hoped that the American Psychiatric Association's recognition of the disease would lead to reforms in the VA health care system. Yet according to the *New York Times*, in 2007 the Department of Defense determined that the "military mental health system [was] overburdened, 'woefully' understaffed, inadequately financed and undermined by the stigma attached to PTSD." Moreover, many veterans remained reluctant to seek treatment. Seth Strasburg was uncomfortable with using PTSD as an explanation for his actions on the night he killed Thomas Varney. He attributed the shooting to the attitudes and behaviors he adopted in Iraq, but believed he simply needed "time to decompress" and readjust to civilian life. "If the exact same circumstances had happened a year later," he argued, "nothing would have happened." Strasburg feared that the use of PTSD as an explanation for his actions would leave him open to ridicule by other servicemen, who might see the diagnosis as evidence he was whiny or weak.[7] His attitude mirrored the VVLP's insistence that Vietnam vets could overcome their readjustment problems with time and good publicity. Strasburg's fear of appearing weak similarly recalled the emphasis on masculine independence that characterized VVLP programs.

Conservative vets have also influenced electoral politics, including the elections of the two most recent presidents. In 1992, the Vietnam Veterans Institute campaigned vigorously against Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton. Clinton's evasion of the draft during the Vietnam War and his support for a policy that would allow homosexuals to serve in the military—provided they remain silent about their sexual orientation—infuriated some conservative vets. VVI head Jerry Yates used his position to support Pat Buchanan's challenge

[7] Sontag and Alvarez, "Across America."

to Republican incumbent George H. W. Bush. Yates decried liberal politicians who, he said, "ignore or compromise issues that are paramount to their constituents…[and] retreat at the thought of special interest groups putting a racist or sexist label on the individual who attempts to make reasonable and judicious use of all the citizens' tax dollars." Yates warned that "Americans continue to fester" with anger at politicians supporting an "obscene domestic social welfare system." He warned: "When they fester enough, when elected officials are sociopathic enough, demons such as Adolph Hitler will rise out from the mist of the bogs and bayous."[8] Yet a few days after Clinton's election, the *New York Times* noted that Bill Clinton was not a vet and Vice-President elect Al Gore was and editorialized: "In effect, Americans said: Enough—let's put the divisiveness of Vietnam behind us. Perhaps now those who fought in the war and those who fought against it can come together in mutual respect."[9]

H. Ross Perot's 1992 presidential bid also demonstrated the extent to which conservative vets' agenda influenced national politics. Vietnam veterans and their supporters were important backers of Perot's candidacy; they favored him because of his work on the Memorial and on POW/MIA issues.[10] In October 1992, when announcing the resumption of his campaign, Perot used a wounded Vietnam veteran's Purple Heart to reinforce the theme of military valor he said informed his decision.[11] Indeed, Perot often expressed his admiration for Vietnam veterans. He

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[8] "Letter to the Editor" from J. Eldon Yates, [n.d., 1992], Folder 15, Box 2, Vietnam Veterans Institute Files, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech.

[9] "Vietnam Veterans Day," *New York Times*, 11 November 1992, A24.

[10] James Ragland, "The Perotists: A Bandwagon That Isn't Waiting," *Washington Post*, 5 April 1992, B1, B3.

[11] "The Uses of Ross Perot," *New York Times*, 2 October 1992, A30.

told an interviewer that he liked to hire vets who, he said, "could be on the wild side." His views on masculinity, too, complemented those of conservative vets. One former employee said that Perot objected to hiring men with a "weak handshake" because he thought it a sign of homosexuality. Perot dismissed negative stories about him written by women journalists as efforts to "prove their manhood."[12]

Moreover, the views of Perot's critics sometimes drew on the conservative veterans' movement or ideas important to it. Conservative columnist William Safire suggested that Perot was obfuscating the reason he had sought an early discharge from the Navy for fear that his actions "would play as unmanly."[13] Other observers analyzed Perot's relationship with the VVMF and concluded that his relentless demands for a heroic addition to the memorial indicated he was a "man obsessed by conspiracies and beset by enemies in his mind, willing to use tactics of espionage and intimidation to destroy those who stand in his way." John Wheeler told reporters that at the height of the memorial controversy, Perot had said: "I'll wipe you out." Wheeler recalled: "It was like being sliced with a knife. The next thing I knew, I was getting threatening phone calls."[14]

These politics resurfaced dramatically in 2004, when conservative Vietnam vets helped undermine Democratic nominee John Kerry's presidential candidacy.[15] A group called Swift

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[12] "A Man Who Likes Things His Way," *New York Times*, 1 October 1992, A19.

[13] William Safire, "Perot's Plea of 'Hardship,'" *New York Times*, 28 May 1992, A23.

[14] Michael Kelly, "Perot Under Fire: Sifting Facts and Motives," *New York Times,* 25 June 1992, A1, A27.

[15] Both conservative and liberal observers argue that the controversy over Kerry's military service reframed his candidacy and helped George W. Bush win the election. See, for example, Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, "Conservatives Laud Swift Boat Veterans," *Fox News*, 16 February 2005,

Boat Veterans for Truth created a series of television ads that questioned the truthfulness of Kerry's account of his military service and suggested that he was not the war hero he claimed. Drawing on the themes of masculinity that pervaded the Vietnam veterans movement, they portrayed Kerry as an effete liberal ill-equipped to handle matters of national security.[16] On the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth steering committee sat John O'Neill, the former head of the Nixon-backed Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace. O'Neill couched his 2004 attacks on Kerry's service and foreign policy views in the same language he had used more than thirty years before.[17] Another group of Vietnam vets allied with the swift boaters produced a documentary, shown on television a few days before the general election, called "Stolen Honor: Wounds That Never Heal." In it, they denounced Kerry's antiwar activities and argued that he had betrayed American POWs and troops still fighting in Vietnam. One of the POWs interviewed in the documentary was Leo Thorsness, the former head of the Los Angeles VVLP office. The producer, Carlton Sherwood, was a Vietnam veteran and former investigative reporter who worked with Ross Perot and Jim Webb in opposing Maya Lin's memorial design. "Stolen Honor," according to a *New York Times* review, was a "specious" assault on John Kerry; the "real subject of the film" was "veterans' unheeded feelings of betrayal and neglect."[18]

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http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,147728,00.html (accessed 2 March 2008) and Errol Morris, "Where's the Rest of Him?" *New York Times*, 18 January 2005, A21.

[16] Frank Rich, "How Kerry Became a Girlie-Man," *New York Times,* 5 September 2004.

[17] Michael Dobbs, "After Decades, Renewed War on Old Conflict," *Washington Post*, 28 August 2004, A01.

[18] Alessandra Stanley, "An Outpouring of Pain, Channeled Via Politics," *New York Times*, 21 October 2004. See also www.stolenhonor.com.

The persistent presence of conservative Vietnam veterans in national political debates helped move their agenda ever further into mainstream politics. In 2006, Jim Webb was elected to the U.S. Senate. He ran in Virginia as a Democrat, though he had been a Republican since 1977, when he left the Democratic Party in part because of his opposition to Carter's pardon of draft evaders.[19] Webb quickly climbed in the Republican ranks and briefly served as Reagan's Secretary of the Navy. Prior to his Senate campaign, Webb's politics were rooted in his status as a veteran, not the ideology of a particular party. In 2004, he penned a column for *USA Today* that questioned the qualifications of both John Kerry and George W. Bush for the Oval Office based on their military records.[20] Despite his background in Republican politics, Webb won the Democratic primary thanks to Virginia's conservative voters, his economic populism, and his opposition to the war in Iraq. He explained his opposition to the conflict by invoking his experiences in Vietnam: "I know what it's like to be on the ground. I know what it's like to fight a war like this, and…there are limits to what the military can do."[21]

Indeed, Webb's 2006 campaign revisited many of the debates he had joined more than twenty years before. His macho military persona was a central component of his campaign. On the stump, he wore combat boots that belonged to a son serving in Iraq and traveled throughout

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[19] In 2006 Webb said that he joined the Republican party because of its tough stance on national security issues. See Robin Toner, "As Senator Falters, A Democrat Rises in Virginia," *New York Times*, 18 September 2006, 1. Yet Rick Atkinson and Robert Timberg, who have both written extensively on Webb's early political career, identify Carter's pardon as the critical factor in Webb's decision to become a Republican. See Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line*, 455; Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale's Song* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 256. The two explanations are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, they highlight the extent of the connection between veterans politics and foreign relations by the late 1970s.

[20] James Webb, "Veterans Face a Conundrum: Kerry or Bush?" *USA Today*, 18 February 2004.

[21] Robin Toner, "As Senator Falters, A Democrat Rises in Virginia."

the state in a camouflage Jeep driven by a buddy from Vietnam.[22] Webb's first television commercial featured footage of Ronald Reagan praising his "gallantry as a Marine officer in Vietnam."[23] Servicewomen and Webb's Republican opponent attacked him for his statements on women in the military made in the 1970s and '80s, but Webb deflected the criticism with claims that he had since changed his mind.[24] Though the conservative veterans politics of the 1980s suffused his campaign, Webb helped the Democratic Party gain control of the Senate in 2006.

Most recently, John McCain, the 2008 Republican presidential nominee, made his experiences as a POW in Hanoi a key component of his campaign and drew attacks from fellow Vietnam veterans. A section of his official campaign website with the heading "Courageous Service" featured a video highlighting McCain's military service as experience that "defines a leader" and "readies a man to lead this nation." Indeed, by evoking "the faith of our fathers" and "the band of brothers," the video suggested that military service and masculinity are intertwined.[25] However, Dr. Phillip Butler, who was a POW along with McCain, made a video with director Robert Greenwald of Brave New Films that argued that McCain's experiences as a POW had not prepared him for the presidency. Butler and Greenwald hoped to counter what

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[22] Ibid.

[23] "Let Reagan Be Reagan," *Washington Post*, 15 September 2006, A18. A staff member at the Reagan Presidential Library, acting on behalf of Nancy Reagan, sent a letter to Webb that demanded he stop using the clip.

[24] Lisa Rein, "Women's Vote Could Tip Close Contest," *Washington Post*, 23 October 2006, A01.

[25] "Courageous Service" video, http://www.johnmccain.com/BVID/ (accessed 19 October 2008).

they called McCain's attempts to "exploit his prisoner of war experience every chance he gets."[26] In January 2008, just before the Republican presidential primary in South Carolina, a group called Vietnam Veterans Against John McCain distributed a flyer to eighty news outlets. It accused McCain of cooperating with the North Vietnamese and of betraying his fellow prisoners of war, accusations leveled at him since he began working with John Kerry to normalize U.S.-Vietnam relations in the late 1970s. The group's leader, Jerry Kiley, was also the head of an organization called Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry that "was widely viewed as a precursor to the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth." Kiley told an interviewer that he and other veterans believed McCain had "earned our disrespect" and explained that the group would not endorse another candidate: "We are not for anyone. We are just against John McCain."[27] Kiley's remarks suggested that the sense of purpose common in the conservative Vietnam veterans movement in the 1980s had dissipated, although veterans continued to play a prominent role in national politics.

Efforts to create federal programs that would shape vets' image contributed to the importance of vets in American politics through 2008. To be sure, vets' efforts to influence politics were not entirely successful. Vietnam veterans lay claim to a militarized, masculine citizenship, but media coverage of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan indicated that the press did not uniformly equate military service with masculine heroism. However, conservative vets built an effective political movement, one that gained considerable traction in American

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[26] Brave New Films, "A Noun, a Verb, and POW," *The Nation*, http://www.thenation.com/doc/20080915/pow_video (accessed 19 October 2008).

[27] Susan Davis, "Anti-McCain Group Goes on the Attack in S.C.," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 January 2008, http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2008/01/15/anti-mccain-group-goes-on-the-attack-in-sc/ (accessed 19 October 2008).

electoral politics. Presidents from Johnson to Reagan hoped to use veterans in order to shore up their own political agendas, a strategy that demanded the equation of Vietnam veterans with the conflict in which they fought. Policymakers believed that a changing image of vets would influence the ways in which Americans thought about the war. This strategy empowered a conservative cohort of veterans who sparked national political debates about the conflict more than thirty years after its end. Efforts to defeat the "Vietnam syndrome" through veterans policy thus consolidated the powerful role of the war in American political culture.