

2. “Not for People Like Us”: Or How the Privileged See the Military



“I’ve raised my sons to be sensitive to others, and to be critical thinkers, so I don’t think they’d be well suited for the military.”

—Los Angeles doctor and mother

Kathy and Frank

How can we argue that there is a disconnect between people of privilege and the military, when the military is so often widely praised? After all, “Support Our Troops” magnetic ribbons adorn the sides of many Lexuses and Mercedeses as well as pickup trucks. Indeed, since the late nineties, all major polls have shown the military to be the most trusted American institution—ahead of Congress, the media, even churches.¹ It has become a mantra for virtually all of us—including our top leadership—the claim to be

1. David C. King and Zachary Karabell, *The Generation of Trust: How the U.S. Military Has Regained the Public’s Confidence Since Vietnam* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press 2003) pp. 1–6.

“proud of the men and women who serve in the military.”² Even antiwar groups and pacifists routinely pay homage to “our men and women.”

Privileged folks may be proud of the troops, but most contemporary men and women in uniform are strangers to the most influential segment of society. Mark Shields, syndicated columnist, former Marine, and PBS pundit, noted in a recent essay on this subject that “probably nobody at any Washington dinner party tonight—liberal or conservative, Bush appointee or Democratic holdover—personally knows any enlisted man or woman now defending the nation.”³

Not too long ago the sons of presidents, bankers, and oilmen regularly served. This was even true for members of powerful dynasties such as the Roosevelts, the Kennedys, the Sulzbergers (owners and publishers of the *New York Times*), and the Bushes. Now, however, not one grandchild from those powerful dynasties serves.

The last president with a child (or son-in-law) in uniform was Lyndon Johnson. Prior to Johnson, it was common for a president’s son to be in or have seen service. And it wasn’t only public servants who shared the responsibility—movie stars and professional athletes joined the ranks when asked. It was considered the right thing to do, somewhat along the lines of the biblical adage that of those to whom much has been given much will be required.

Though post-Vietnam it is common for people in positions of influence to publicly praise the people who serve, there is evidence that of all segments of society, the leadership class has the least esteem

2. “Soldiers and Civilians. The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security,” ed. Peter D. Feaver & Richard H. Kohn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); hereafter *Soldiers & Civilians*.

3. Mark Shields, “In Power, but Not in Peril,” *United We Serve*, ed. E. J. Dionne, Kayla Meltzer Drogosz, and Robert E. Litan (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004) p. 135.

for the military. Perhaps this is because of all Americans they have the fewest personal connections to the military.

In the most important recent study on the subject of civil-military affairs, American leaders and members of the general public who had no military service experience were polled, along with military and reserve leaders, and civilian veterans.⁴ As expected, virtually everyone repeated that they were "proud of the men and women who serve in the military" and have "confidence in the ability of our military to perform well in wartime." But our society's most powerful leaders who had no military experience parted company with other American groups in significant ways.⁵ For instance, fewer than *half* of the leaders in the larger society thought the U.S. armed forces were attracting high-quality, motivated recruits. In contrast, a strong majority—more than three-quarters—of military leaders thought that they were.⁶

People in leadership positions in society and without military experience, in fact, had the lowest opinion of the military of any group surveyed. While a majority of all other groups said they had a "great deal" of confidence in the military, only about a third of those in the elite classes said the same.⁷ Civilians in the leadership class—in other words, our most privileged citizens—judged that

4. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, principal investigators, Project on the Gap between the Military and American Society, Triangle Institute of Security Studies (TISS) Durham, NC, 1998–2001; hereafter cited as TISS.

5. Ole R. Holsti, "Of Chasms and Convergences: Attitudes and Beliefs of Civilians and Military Elites at the Start of the New Millenium" in *Soldiers & Civilians*, table 1.23, p. 72, "Opinions about the US Military: Reponses in the 1998–1999 Survey." Interestingly, while virtually all military strongly agreed they were proud of the people who served, only about half of the elite nonveterans strongly agreed with the statement. The rest "agreed somewhat."

6. TISS, *Ibid.* Although, interestingly perhaps, virtually all the military folks strongly agreed with this statement.

7. TISS, table 1.17, p. 61.

military culture was very rigid, not at all creative, and not particularly honest.⁸ These opinions were in marked contrast to the military's view of itself and to the much higher esteem the military was held in by those in the less privileged classes from which more military people are currently drawn.⁹

Members of the military are strangers to the upper classes. And it seems privileged folks want to keep it that way. They have consciously or unconsciously done all they can to avoid having anyone close to them become a member of the military. Private high schools and many of our leading colleges are hostile to military recruiters or have banned them and organizations like the ROTC (or JROTC) altogether from their campuses. And speaking anecdotally, the majority of the people we have run across who are not connected to the military already, who are making good money or are involved in opinion making or in academia, the media or in policy work, flinch at the suggestion that their children serve.

One way to sum up the disconnect between the wealthiest and most influential class of Americans and our military is to ask yourself this question: Would you be surprised to hear that actor Leonardo DiCaprio or Steven Spielberg's son or the daughter of the president of Yale or one of George Bush's daughters or a Kennedy grandchild or the son of the president of Microsoft had enlisted? If the answer is yes, then why would you be surprised? What assumptions have you made about our all-volunteer forces and who is the "appropriate" volunteer?

Research backs the intuitive assumption that our elites just don't want their children to serve these days. In the survey above, leaders

8. TISS, table 1.16, p. 60. Seventy-eight point six percent of civilian nonveteran leaders identify military culture as rigid. Fifteen percent see it as creative. Fifty-eight percent think it's honest.

9. TISS. The figures are, 51.5 percent see it as rigid, 43.5 percent see it as creative, 94.4 percent see it as honest.

in the larger society were four or five times more likely than a military leader to say that they would be “disappointed if a child of mine joined the military.”¹⁰

Frank

Had I been polled in 1999 (when John signed up), I would have marked myself in that “disappointed” group too. When my son graduated from high school, I felt as singled out and embarrassed as I had when I was a child and my mother would say excruciatingly long graces over our meals in public. The rest of the world tucked into their rosemary chicken while we “witnessed to the lost,” over plates of congealing food. I spent the better part of an early chapter in my semiautobiographical novel, *Portofino*, describing in detail what it was like to furtively watch other diners furtively watching us, sitting with our heads bowed while Mom delivered her loud long nightly and highly personal monologue to God.

That’s a little bit how I felt when John announced from the podium of his private school at graduation that he was going into the Marines—mortified. I had known he was going to do it, but when he spoke the words in public, it still came as a shock. Everyone else had named a top college. Other parents would not look in our direction. The applause was a trifle polite and seemed nervous. John stood there so tall and so beautiful in his gown. The emerald lawn was extra green and perfect-looking, framed by the snappy yellow-and-white-striped tent pavilion. Well-dressed parents ferried the prizes their sons and daughters had won from the pavilion back to their Mercedeses, Saabs, and Jags. John had his prizes too, for writing and athletics. But they seemed wasted. What was the use of being one of the school’s best poets—someone who had been invited to read along with adults at local libraries—when he

10. TISS.

was going to throw away his talents and join the Marines? What was the point of John having been a great athlete when all he would use his beautiful body for now was to crawl around in the mud with God knows what kind of riffraff, instead of winning the track scholarship that everyone had assumed he'd pick up as he sailed into college?

Champagne flowed for parents and fruit drinks for the students. The other parents and kids all looked so safe and content. They looked well and happy and rich, beyond the slings and arrows of ordinary life, as if they had figured out some way to live forever. I tried to picture John in boot camp. I couldn't. I had a much easier time imagining him in a flag-draped coffin. Why should John be any different from all his friends? Why is life unfair?

"What a waste," commented a parent seated near me at John's graduation.

"We should carefully evaluate what went wrong," said another parent, a professor of history at Brown University, at a postgraduation parents' day encounter with the headmaster.

Kathy

I cross between the worlds of opinion makers and the military when I drive back and forth between Washington, D.C., and Jacksonville, North Carolina. D.C. is career strategizing over great food, listening to my friends' nanny-crises, admiring real art on people's walls, and going to meetings about how to fix the Democratic Party. Jacksonville is fixing spaghetti dinners on paper plates, going to volunteer meetings in rooms full of linoleum and metal folding furniture, relying on my neighbors to watch the kids when I'm desperate, and staying up late at night to pack cardboard boxes with children's artwork, almonds, old *New Yorkers*, and love notes.

Many of my lifelong friends are in Washington. I care about the business there, and I am still idealistic about it (although it helps sometimes to be a bit removed from the sausage-making aspect of politics). But some of the people I run across in the Capitol see the military as if through the small end of the telescope, and I have to summon the energy to address the issues that come up.

From the earliest days of my marriage, people said little things, questions probing how it could happen that someone like my husband—so smart, so versatile—ended up in the military. Was there a tragedy in his past, perhaps? Other military folks from nonmilitary backgrounds usually have experiences like these. The mother of a Marine officer I know once said about him, about nine years into his career, "What a waste of a college education." (This man now has several advanced degrees, has taught at MIT, and is in command of one of the air groups operating in Iraq.)

Said one mother to me, "I've raised my sons to be sensitive to others, and to be critical thinkers, so I don't think they'd be well suited for the military." *Critical thinking* is of course the byword of liberal arts education, and the military is the imagined antithesis of it, where one merely, unthinkingly, follows orders.

A young friend of mine, now an attorney making many times a general officer's salary at a top Manhattan law firm, recounted to me how he had once wanted to join the military for a tour of duty, having picked up an old-fashioned notion somewhere. "It's not for people like us," his family told him. "You're too smart; you've got too much going for you to throw your life away like that."

A vivacious young woman of my acquaintance, a public-interest activist and Stanford grad, dated a Marine recently, much to her own surprise. "It's not popular with my friends," she admits. "They wonder if I'm compromising my ideals."

Kathy and Frank

Writing about the military-civilian disconnect, author Josiah Bunting III finds that students at the top boarding and public high schools and the famous universities and colleges are now “fully settled . . . in their contempt or condescension for the profession of arms.”¹¹ The situation is tantamount to a withdrawal of the privileged intellectual, professional, and commercial classes, their children, or those destined for high position from the active military service of America. As Bunting puts it, few of those who “lead our country, who control its resources and institutions, direct and inflect its tastes and opinions, batten most avidly upon its treasures and most lavishly upon its expensive entertainments” are touched by war or those who serve. And this state of affairs is “dangerous . . . unworthy . . . wrong.”

Andrew J. Bacevich, a professor at Boston University and Vietnam veteran, points out that while “minority and working-class kids might serve; the sons and daughters of those who occupy positions of influence in the corporate, intellectual, academic, journalistic, and political worlds have better things to do.”¹² He summarized the attitude of those in high position as, “Although we don’t know you, rest assured we admire you—now please go away.”¹³

RECRUITING

The area that best exposes the deep discomfort that putatively supportive segments of America show toward the military is the reality of military recruiting. After all, logically, if you “support the

11. Josiah Bunting III, “Class Warfare,” *The American Scholar* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2005) p. 12.

12. Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 26.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

troops" and are grateful for the protection they offer, then their act of service is of inestimable value. And if you don't want the draft to be used to maintain our military's numbers, then one would think every courtesy would be extended to recruiters. Moreover, in America many of us like to pretend that we are a classless society. "Equal opportunity" is a mantra for the right, left, rich, and poor. But when it comes to military service, the upper classes don't even pretend they want the playing field level.

Perhaps this is part of a larger shift of our country toward becoming a plutocracy, the "two nations" some politicians have talked about. We've learned to accept the fact that a failed CEO gets a \$40-million golden handshake, while the company's workers get nothing. And now we are learning to accept the fact that anyone but the most privileged Americans defend us, and that the most privileged Americans find excuses to make sure their children are not even exposed to recruiters.

Anti-recruiter actions are not limited to a few elite "liberal" universities. There are a growing number of Americans who will not allow their children's high schools to give their names and addresses to recruiters. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, high schools are required to give the names, phone numbers, and addresses of graduating students to military recruiters unless parents request their children be omitted from the program. Many parents apparently find it unbearably onerous that their children might be asked to even consider serving their country, even though their children not only may refuse the phone call but, of course, are under no obligation to join.

In challenging the law, Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, argued, "Students have a right to not be bothered by aggressive military recruiters."¹⁴ So not being

14. *New York Times*, "Uncle Sam Wants Student Lists, and Schools Fret," January 29, 2003.

asked to even consider service is now defended as some sort of new civil right.¹⁵

A number of wealthy communities have even tried to launch initiatives to make their towns “recruiting free” zones, where the military is banned. Cambridge, Massachusetts, San Francisco, California, and other well-off enclaves have followed suit. This is a position that has excited some controversy. *Mother Jones*, a left-wing publication published several articles condemning the ability of recruiters to reach high school students. In response, Steven J. Naplan, who served as director for democracy and human rights at the Clinton White House’s National Security Council, wrote:¹⁶

“Privacy” is the smokescreen behind which *Mother Jones* and these critics attempt to mask their discomfort with the U.S. military—the same military which saved hundreds of thousands of Africans from certain starvation in the early 1990s, saved hundreds of thousands of Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims from mass murder just a few years later, and which today trains the young men and women who risk and sometimes lose their lives to protect us all from the terrorists who would happily take the lives of every last *Mother Jones* editor, writer, and subscriber. . . .

If the U.S. military is to reflect the diversity of America and is to be peopled by the talented, dedicated young Americans we’d want protecting our freedoms and representing our nation, it has no choice but to engage in the extensive recruitment of high school seniors—an honorable and vital mission which deserves our cooperation, not obstruction. In the broadest sense, the U.S. military protects our freedom

15. Ibid.

16. Steven J. Naplan, communication with the authors, November 27, 2002.

to advocate progressive politics. The U.S. military is not the enemy.

The drafters of a local ballot measure in San Francisco apparently don't agree. Their initiative is called "College Not Combat," and it asks city officials and university administrators to exclude military recruiters from both colleges and high schools in San Francisco, even at the cost of forsaking government dollars. It urges the city to create scholarships and training programs to reduce the military's appeal to young adults. A report on the initiative described it as "part of a nationwide movement against the Pentagon's recruiting efforts."¹⁷

One otherwise pro-military parent was explicit about this point when speaking to recruiters recently. Marine recruiter Staff Sergeant Jason Rivera, twenty-six, went to a home in a well-to-do suburb outside of Pittsburgh to talk to the parents of a high school student who had expressed interest in joining the Marine Corps Reserves. Two American flags flew in the yard. The mother greeted the recruiter wearing an American flag T-shirt. "I want you to know we support you," she gushed. But, explained, as she sent him away, "Military service isn't for our kind of people."¹⁸

THE POSITION LAID BARE

Frank had a conversation that seems to us to lay bare the not-with-my-privileged-child upper-class thinking in all its splendid confusion.

Rose (not her real name) is the quintessential resident of Boston. She is a Radcliffe graduate, and her husband and only son are Harvard alums. She is wealthy and describes herself as a progressive

17. Associated Press, "Initiative Opposes Military Recruiting on Campus," *New York Times*, July 13, 2005.

18. Jack Kelly, "Parent-Trap Snares Military Recruiters," *Jacksonville Daily News*, August 22, 2005, p. 5A.

activist. She sits on the boards of important local and national environmentalist groups. She is the quintessential enlightened WASP's WASP. In her social dealings with Frank, she has been unfailingly kind. However, over the military issue, and especially Frank's son's joining, all Rose's rather polite social sensitivities seemed to have evaporated, at least during one particular conversation.

Frank and Rose were talking about John's military service. Rose launched into a somewhat disjointed monologue. Later, Frank rushed home and wrote it all down, inspired to use the material as the basis of a character in his novel *Baby Jack*. Here is some of what she said:

"Afghanistan was not all bad; I could rationalize Afghanistan, but there is *nothing* about this war [in Iraq] I can rationalize . . . My father served in World War II. But that was a good war . . .

"Perhaps there is something valuable about military discipline, something like the Native American males did—go camp alone in the woods for two weeks, then you could be a man. But I'd be horrified if *my* son volunteered.

"I don't think all-male societies are dimensional. I think they are one-dimensional. I know they tolerate women in the military these days, but John is in the Marines and they train all those boys together and the females train separately. What does that imply? You must try to get John to reread *On the Beach* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Catch-22* before it is too late . . . You never know, he might *reenlist*! They do brainwash these poor boys, you know!

"Don't misunderstand me. I do know people for whom the military was a constructive experience. There was a former Marine at Harvard Law my husband was in school with, and I believe he is a judge now. However, who wants to kill or be killed? There is no discussion possible. There is no logic.

"You should ask John, What are your needs? What needs propelled you into the military?"

"If my son was about to do this, here is what I'd tell him: 'You should aim to work at the cabinet level.' I would say; 'If you want to serve your country, work to develop *real* leadership, to make a *real* difference. Why don't you work on one of those political campaigns?' I'd ask."



We have come to see this conversation as a sort of touchstone summary of all the many conversations we have both had with people who have had no personal contact with anyone in the military. In other words, going to war is, above all, about the self—about individual choice and the individual exercise of conscience; about subconscious, perhaps even unhealthy, needs; and about balancing ambitions and what is in one's own best interest. And all these factors add up to . . . saying no to military service and feeling morally superior for making that choice.

Some public figures in America have spoken about this issue. For instance, Louis Caldera, secretary of the army in the Clinton administration, wonders why calls for national service usually focus on projects such as building housing for poor people and tutoring inner city children, but do not include calls for military service. Caldera speculates that it may come from the "misconceptions about the nature of modern military service, discomfort with the fundamental role of the military, and lingering suspicion and hostility arising from an antiwar movement that spanned three decades, and unhappiness with current policies toward openly gay service members."¹⁹

19. Louis Caldera, "The American Military and the Idea of Service" in *United We Serve*, p. 150.

THE GROWING GAP

The gap between the upper classes and the military reinforces its own existence, a little bit the way racism is reinforced in all-white, segregated communities, where many well-meaning people can say of the “other,” “I just don’t know any of them.” Analysis of why people choose to join the military shows that the single biggest factor is whether someone has a direct personal experience with someone they admire who is in or was in the service. Young men and women who have known and looked up to someone who wore a uniform and spoke positively about the experience are significantly more likely to be interested in joining the military than those who have not.

Frank’s son John mentions Matt Snider, an Air Force captain (now a major) he met just a few times and how impressed he was with him, his dedication, and what an all-round inspiring human being he was. And John knew one boy in a nearby town—Max Boucher—who volunteered for the Marines. John had always liked and admired Max. And by coincidence Max’s little brother Asher got to Parris Island a few weeks ahead of John. These few casual contacts were enough to make the idea of volunteering tangible.

Kathy’s husband, Greg, was influenced in part by his adopted godfather, Pat Fitzsimons, who became a role model and mentor to Greg when he was in college. Pat was Chief of Police in Seattle when Greg met him, a wonderfully ethical, kind, and successful man who had also been a Marine Corps officer.

Several university classmates of Frank’s son John showed an interest in military service after getting to know John, none of whom had considered it before. One of his friends actually volunteered. Until they met John, his new friends had never known anyone in the military and had never even considered the possibility of joining. (John is going to a college that banned the ROTC from campus back

in the Vietnam era and has never asked them back.) All of a sudden the military had a face, a face they liked. But few upper class children ever meet anyone in the military today.

As a result of dwindling personal contacts with the military, what intelligent, motivated, and idealistic young people are left with are their parents' post-Vietnam biases and fears, the mass media, and what they hear from their often anti-military teachers.

THE UNIVERSITIES

In 1956, 400 out of 750 in Princeton's graduating class went into the military. In contrast, in 2004, 9 members of Princeton's graduating class entered the services, and they *led* the Ivy League in numbers! In 2003, the only student at Columbia planning to become a military officer was such an anomaly she merited a whole story in the *New York Times* headlined, "For a Future Soldier Life on a Liberal Campus Can Be a Battle" (April 2, 2003). In the story, Marine officer candidate Rebekah Pazmino said she felt constantly under attack. According to the area Marine recruiters Frank talked to in a follow-up, she eventually felt so harassed she dropped out of the program altogether.

This e-mail to Frank from another student confirms that Ms. Pazmino was no exception.

I am a twenty-two-year-old college student about to graduate . . . My heart is pulling me toward the Navy. My father was, or rather is, a Marine and he instilled much of the spirit of the Marine Corps in me growing up.

My college experience is a much different matter. I am an anthropologist . . . An extremely liberal educational system and an even more radically liberal anthropological community surrounds me.

In my path toward the Navy, I have been attempting to gather letters of recommendation and have hit a wall. Many of my professors have praised me as an academician but refused to write the recommendations for me on the basis that they are conscientious objectors . . .

The truth of it is all of my school has been hostile toward the military. I have met more resistance in the past two months of exploring the possibility of commissioning than I have ever had to contend with before . . .

Thank you,
(Name withheld)

Charles Moskos conducted a survey of 430 undergraduates in his introduction to sociology class at Northwestern University. A large majority of them had negative impressions of military life, with lifestyle, threat of danger, and length of commitment heading people's lists.²⁰ This is not a surprising result. It also confirms another study Moskos did. In his sociology classes he conducted studies that demonstrated how lack of personal contact with military men and women often precludes people from even thinking about joining the military, and conversely how personal contact goes a long way toward humanizing and legitimizing the idea of service.

At the university level, some of the outright hostility toward military service, particularly from the faculty, is focused on ROTC. Such top universities as Harvard, Yale, Stanford, University of Chicago, Brown, and Columbia do not even allow ROTC access to campus to present the option of military service and the scholarship to their students. The current stated reason for banning ROTC is the "don't ask, don't tell" law, which prohibits openly gay people from serving.

20. Charles Moskos, "Patriotism-Lite Meets the Citizen-Soldier," in *United We Serve*, p. 37.

ROTC's absence on campus does not help to change the law about gays in the military—only Congress could do that, so the protest is misdirected—but it does very effectively discourage some of the country's best students from volunteering for duty or ever meeting someone who has. And no one even pretends to think that if the policy on gays in the military changed, the elite universities would suddenly encourage their students to volunteer.

The divide between those who serve and those who don't now goes far beyond any one battle in America's culture wars. The current antipathy to the military has its roots in the politics of the 1960s and early '70s. And it seems to us another factor has been added: class. The spirit of the student deferments and exemptions of the Vietnam era has been carried forward into the all-volunteer era.

The faculty of many top universities seem to believe that their students are entitled to not be bothered with something like military service. "Our kind" belongs on a faster track. We are reminded of Rose's comment: "You should aim to work at the cabinet level . . . If you want to serve your country, work to develop *real* leadership, to make a *real* difference."

We contend that military service might in fact confer the real-world experience, confidence, and moral authority that no university can offer to its students. Some students who spend a few years between high school and college in the military might actually arrive in college with the discipline and maturity to make better use of the experience.

In short, an anti-military college culture that may once have had political roots in the Vietnam era has now deteriorated into plain elitism and a set of fossilized, unchallenged anti-military assumptions. And once in a while—as with the gays-in-the-military debate—the old bias is updated and given new "reasons." But such updating seems to us to be a sham. For instance, in 2005 Harvard Law School prosecuted a suit to allow it to both ban the military from recruiting

its graduates on campus, while still keeping the federal funding that the Solomon amendment requires them to forgo in such circumstances. Stripped bare of the gays-in-the-military political pretense, Harvard Law School's attempt to prevent military recruiters from even asking the school's students to consider service was startlingly elitist. The law school, which is part of an institution that has a \$25-billion endowment (at the last count), that disproportionately draws the sons and daughters of the self-perpetuating elite, that pays its financial managers millions of dollars annually, was suing our government to stop its students from *even being asked* to just think about joining the sons and daughters of middle-class and working-class Americans defending all of us.

The sheer hubris implicit in such a shameless act is staggering. And it is hard to see how this NIMBYism (*not in my backyard*; or worse—let-somebody-poor-brown-black-or-rural-white-do-all-the-heavy-lifting) can be dressed up as “progressive.” Meanwhile, Harvard Law School encourages recruiting from the bastions of moral probity that represent claimants such as Enron, provide the tobacco industry with lobbyists, or whoever else can pay a \$140,000-per-year starting salary to recruit Harvard Law's lucky graduates.

When looking at the recent history of the Ivy League, one doesn't need to look hard to find many examples of how our elites' attitude toward military service has changed. Harvard University had the first ROTC program in the country. Neil Rudenstine, the former president of Harvard, was commissioned through the ROTC program at Princeton in 1956 as an undergraduate and served along with literally hundreds of his classmates. As of 2005, however, three anonymous Harvard alums had to fund the handful of ROTC students on campus to participate in MIT's ROTC program. Harvard's school government is so hostile to ROTC that they forbid any level of support at all. Here are some examples of what happens when Harvard meets military.

Members of Harvard's faculty have reportedly yelled out disparaging remarks to a passing ROTC student in uniform, and students in Harvard Yard asking passersby to sign holiday cards for service members overseas on the Christmas after 9/11 were met by a shout of "fascists."²¹ In fact, in 2002 students in Harvard's ROTC program created an organization to seek to encourage "greater tolerance at Harvard for those in uniform." Members of the organization acknowledged that they are "continually disheartened by the persistent anti-ROTC sentiment on Harvard's campus," pointing out poignantly that they, the cadets, have taken an oath to "protect the lives and freedoms of American citizens, even sacrificing our lives if duty calls."²² The then-outgoing director of the MIT program that included Harvard ROTC students noted in a farewell address that the Harvard Law School "still holds the military with disdain."²³ Harvard University President Lawrence Summers has alienated some of his faculty with his support for ROTC.

On Columbia University's campus, students and faculty have been embroiled in a controversy over ROTC, which has led to many public comments on all sides. Perhaps the most notorious and extreme were statements made by Nicholas Paul De Genova, an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology/Latino Studies, at a Columbia University "teach-in" protesting the war in Iraq. As reported in the *New York Times*, Professor De Genova said, "I personally would like to see a million Mogadishus," a reference to the Somali city where, in 1993, American soldiers were ambushed and eighteen killed who were then dragged through the streets. Now,

21. Christopher M. Loomis, "Senior to Sail Troubled Waters," *Harvard Crimson*, June 10, 2004; Charles B. Cromwell, "Explaining the Uniform," *Harvard Crimson*, February 7, 2002.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Brian L. Baker, LTC, "A Perspective From the Professor of Military Science," reported in www.AdvocatesForROTC.org, November 30, 2004.

of course we are not arguing that this is a typical response. But consider a few more examples. At a forum on Columbia's campus in 2003, one of the presenters argued against a "military presence in Columbia's student body" because members of the armed forces are trained to "evaporate dissent" and thus would impede free and open debate in the classroom. Another presenter condemned the entire U.S. military as racist.²⁴ In a column in Columbia's student newspaper, another student charged that ROTC participants want to "rape [gays] with broomsticks." The writer went on to say that joining the military is "flushing your education down the toilet" and that he "cannot comprehend why anyone would want to be in the military."²⁵

Many alumni from Columbia and even some students have fought to reinstate ROTC at that campus, but thus far, they have failed. Columbia is not unique in its apparent hostility to our military. Professor David Gelernter describes the climate at Yale:

Here in academia, my colleagues seem determined to turn American soldiers into an out-of-sight, out-of-mind servant class who are expected to do their duty and keep their mouths shut . . . If you think I'm too hard on my fellow professors, explain to me why Army ROTC host colleges do not include Harvard, Yale, Stanford, the University of Chicago, Caltech . . . (Princeton and a few other top universities deserve credit for not being on this list.)

How can you be terrified of an alleged new draft . . . and opposed to ROTC's soliciting first-rate volunteers?

. . . A few weeks ago, I spoke [in] an informal debate at

24. Nat Jacks, "Panel Speakers Link ROTC to War With Iraq," *Columbia Spectator*, April 1, 2003.

25. Nick Rosenthal, "ROTC, You Are (Still) Not Wanted Here," *Columbia Spectator*, February 16, 2005.

Yale, and an imposing middle-aged man with fierce white hair came up afterward to ask me where I got the nerve to support a president who sends young soldiers to their deaths? (Lots of approving nods.)

. . . A 17-year-old boy tried to explain to the white-haired man (in his straightforward, soft-spoken way) that those soldiers had chosen to be where they were; had understood and accepted the dangers; loved life just as much as the man did, but had different ideas about how to live it. The 17-year-old mentioned that he and a friend planned to join the Marines when they finished college.

. . . I had a stake in the argument: the 17-year-old is my son. I don't know whether he'll make it into the Marines; we'll be proud of him either way. I do know that there is a time for every purpose under heaven, and that age 17 is a good time for caring about honor and duty *and* demonstrating the stuff you are made of.²⁶

Or take Stanford. In 1956, 1,100 Stanford students enrolled in ROTC; today there are 29. They are trained off-campus, taking military science and national defense courses at Berkeley or Santa Clara, classes for which Stanford University grants them no credit—although the students can get credit on campus for classes in hip-hop or yoga.²⁷ One Stanford professor contends that training for military service is “fundamentally unacceptable at a university”; another that top schools should not teach “militaristic approaches to problems.”²⁸

At Brown, ROTC students (like those at most schools) report

26. “Soldiers Do Us the Honor,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 2005.

27. Christina Hoff Sommers, “Repressing ROTC,” *Washington Post*, August 10, 2003, p. B7.

28. *Ibid.* Barton Bernstein, professor of history, and Cecilia Ridgeway, sociologist and member of the Stanford Faculty Senate, quoted.

that most other students at least “tolerate” them, but that they do get their “share of harassment.” One Brown cadet recounts having to move his seat in class after a student complained that his uniform “makes me feel uncomfortable.” Like his Harvard counterpart, this lone cadet pleads with his classmates not to “rush to judgment on a person in uniform, consider that while cadets are united in our . . . desire to defend and serve the people of the United States, we are students too, with our own independent beliefs, political views, and thoughts.”²⁹

Carol Cohen, an associate dean of Brown and the coordinator for ROTC, believes ROTC is “incompatible with the principles of a liberal arts education.”³⁰ With friends like Dean Cohen, who needs enemies? Some members of Brown’s faculty apparently agree. One Brown professor argues, “public and private universities shouldn’t be in the business of making better officers . . . the missions of the military and a liberal arts education are fundamentally different.”³¹

Princeton, Dartmouth, and the University of Pennsylvania have ROTC programs. One Princeton ROTC student we spoke with who told us he had had no negative experiences, however, recalled his instructor being heckled on campus as a “baby killer.” (The instructor replied, “I defend your right to say that, and someday you may thank me.”)

More typical is a more overtly benign but pernicious feeling that “it” is “not for people like us.” Paradoxically, the same individuals who may be moved to decry the fact that the military recruits more among less-advantaged groups still do their best to prevent those who are more advantaged from learning about service through on-campus representation.

29. “ROTC Cadets Are Students, Not Robots,” *Brown Daily Herald*, January 27, 2005.

30. Aidan Levy, “Interest in ROTC Minimal at Brown Despite Debate at Other Ivies,” *Brown Daily Herald*, February 15, 2005.

31. *Ibid.* Catherine Lutz, professor of anthropology, quoted.

We are not the only people to note the elitism that has deformed the view of the military on many American campuses. After reading Frank and John's book *Keeping Faith*, former president George Herbert Walker Bush wrote to Frank:

September 24, 2002

Dear Frank,

. . . There's a lot about being President that I do *not* miss. But I *do* miss working with our great military. I respect those who serve. I realize that even today, even after 9/11, there are still those who look down on our men/women who serve. Why do several Ivy League schools still hate the military? There's a cultural arrogance . . .

All the best,

George Bush

THE MEDIA

Books have been written about the tension between members of the mainstream media and the military, such as *The Media and the Military: Why the Press Cannot Be Trusted to Cover a War*, by William V. Kennedy. Kennedy charges that the media lacks the training and understanding of military issues to cover wars competently, and moreover that cultural biases lead editors to shy away from positive coverage. For instance, Kennedy recounts the words of journalist Fred Reeds, who reports, "I know that I can easily sell articles criticizing the military, but that a piece praising anything the services do is nearly impossible to peddle. In conversation, magazine editors almost without exception are hostile and contemptuous of the military."³²

32. William V. Kennedy, *The Media and the Military: Why the Press Cannot Be Trusted to Cover a War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1993), p. 14.

Many in the media challenge these assumptions. Moreover, we suspect that the media feels that problems are news, support isn't. In the interest of unbiased reporting, they believe that when they have a statement from a member of the military showing support for his or her service, they feel the need to go to great lengths to show that support as only half of the story. In one telling incident in late 2003, Frank received a call from a National Public Radio reporter soon after he did a commentary for their news program *All Things Considered*. She asked Frank if he could help her find a quote to balance what she called "All the pro-military stuff typical of military people" for a story she was producing on military families. She had been having trouble rounding up a negative "balancing quote."

"You're in touch with a lot of those people," she said. "You must know somebody who will share their bad experience with us."

In fact, Frank was able to help her out. He pointed her to a woman having trouble with the medical benefits due her wounded son—she had written to Frank blasting the Department of Veterans Affairs. Two days later the reporter called Frank again.

"You wouldn't have another source, would you?" she asked.

"How come?" asked Frank.

"Well, she said that in spite of her problems with the paperwork, she's proud of her son's service and won't make the sort of statement I'm looking for."

Of course, there are disgruntled members of the military family. However, quoting "both sides," say, from mothers whose sons have been killed in combat, may paint a false picture for the public, who are left assuming there is some sort of fifty-fifty split between those in the military who feel military service is a positive vocation and those who don't. And yet, Frank was hard-pressed to find that one disgruntled mother from a file of literally several thousand e-mails in response to his books and newspaper articles. He had plenty of people's letters complaining about some aspect of service or their

fears for their children's safety, but the complaints were not about military service per se.

However, what the media do not report on is perhaps even more telling than what they do write. The newspapers read by the elite classes—the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*—seem infrequently to cover heroism among those who serve. Yet heroism strikes us as one of the most admirable and impressive qualities that military service inspires in those who volunteer. And without understanding heroism the public can't begin to understand why so many military men and women are inspired to reenlist. For newspapers trying to let readers know what military life is like—or about what motivates military people—to ignore individual stories about heroism is to leave the public uninformed.

Often very ordinary people do stunningly heroic things while in uniform. In previous eras, it was common for the newspapers just mentioned to cover these stories often, to give them prominent attention in a front section. Today most of the time our prestige press seems to regard the heroism of their fellow Americans in uniform as something not fit for publication. Perhaps they don't want to have anything in their pages mistaken for the kind of cheering section that the press provided when we were in the Second World War. During that war, the line between government propaganda and journalism was crossed often (most famously by a *New York Times* reporter who enthusiastically covered the dropping of the atomic bomb and later went so far as to disparage the truth of reports from Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the Japanese were dying of radiation poisoning.)

Our elite press may think that reporting acts of heroism plays into the hands of the Pentagon's propaganda spinners or may boost the stature of a disliked administration or policy. Perhaps they do not want the glory of any individual soldier to rub off on political leaders or a war they might oppose. Or perhaps they simply don't know about heroism, because they don't understand what the military does and

they don't get close enough to see it. This may be another price we pay for the fact that very few editors and reporters—who are predominantly drawn from the ranks of the Ivy League—have anyone in their own family serving, as reporters and editors often did in World War II. We have a hunch that regardless of their politics, if the senior editors and reporters at our biggest newspapers had a child in uniform, they might approach reporting on the heroic acts of their child's fellow warriors, on whom their child's life depended, rather differently.

It is a shame that stories of heroism are ignored. A whole generation of Americans is growing up without knowing that very ordinary young people such as themselves can rise to great heights of bravery. What follows are some of the hundreds of recent stories that were not covered in the major media. (These stories were reported directly to us by family members, in the independent *The Marine Corps Times*, or in the “military interest” section of the local paper in Kathy's military base community.³³)



Battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Lopez's convoy was ambushed in Iraq in April 2004. During the fighting, an AK-47 round slammed into Lopez's bulletproof vest and ricocheted off into his back. He fought back, and he brought the convoy to a safe place to evacuate five wounded Marines, plus an Iraqi translator. Lopez himself refused to be evacuated. He then led the entire battalion in a forty-eight-hour fight against hundreds of insurgents, while his wound continued bleeding through his bandages and cammies. His battalion eventually routed the insurgents.

Paul Smith was a combat engineer—which means he was trained to provide construction and demolition, often under fire in tough

33. Lisa Hoffman, “Roster of American Combat Heroes in Iraq Is Rich,” Scripps Howard News Service, May 3, 2005.

terrain in Iraq. In 2003 he was with a group of sixteen traveling in an armored personnel carrier, trapped by one hundred Special Republican Guard fighters with rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, and assault rifles. The crew of the armored vehicle carrying the Americans were wounded and unable to drive. Smith raised himself out of the personnel carrier, took control of a mounted gun, and fired five hundred rounds while he was hit repeatedly, to the extent that the ceramic plate on his flak jacket was shattered. Smith saved the lives of every man in his squad, covering them while they made it to safety. In the end, fifty of the enemy were killed. Of the Americans, only Paul Smith died.

In 2004, Brad Kasal led a handful of Marines into an insurgent-held house to rescue three trapped and wounded comrades. During the course of the rescue, Kasal was shot seven times and used his body to shield an injured comrade, absorbing forty pieces of shrapnel. He survived, as did the injured Marine and all but one of the other Marines.

Twenty-three-year-old Todd Bolding was handing out soccer balls and school supplies to a group of Iraqi children, when the children came under attack by a rocket-propelled grenade. Bolding did not retreat to safety, but rushed to the children, struggling to treat their wounds, when the attackers struck again. Bolding was fatally wounded in the continuing attack.

Jason Hendrix spent his own savings to buy other soldiers night-vision goggles, flashlights, and face masks. He donated his rations regularly to hungry Iraqi children, and gave his Christmas leave to a friend to go home and see his new baby. In February 2004, Jason's squad deliberately attracted fire in an attempt to draw enemy fire away from advancing troops. When the vehicles in his squad burst into flames, Jason ran back to the various vehicles repeatedly in an attempt to save his comrades. He managed to save six soldiers from fiery deaths before an explosion killed him.



We do get body counts on page one: “Iraq Deaths Top 2,000” or “14 Soldiers Die in One Attack.” And in some papers the names of the dead are listed in small boxes tucked away deep in the paper—name, and rank, and day of death. The body counts seem to be disconnected from any moral meaning of individual sacrifice. What was accomplished during the mission? What is the meaning behind the number? Who were the heroes in the engagement? What did they do? Who struggled to save them as brave medics shielded fallen comrades with their bodies, as an Army nurse sat up for seventy hours holding one soldier’s hand? As a daring pilot flew a bad-weather air-to-air refueling mission so a wounded soldier being air-lifted to treatment might have a chance to survive? Who speaks for America’s heroes?



Through his e-mail correspondence Frank became friends with Mindy Evin, the mother of Mark Evin, a young Marine killed in Iraq during the early stages of that war. Mindy is a psychotherapist and not what people might picture as a typical military parent. Mark was her only child. In September of 2005, several years after Mark was killed, Frank asked Mindy for the details surrounding her son’s death. In answer Mindy wrote:

This [answering Frank’s question] has been much harder to do than I realized. I went back to look at some of the material that I had about Mark and his death, and saw that the story is always slightly different in each account. I know it doesn’t matter, but I got stuck on that for a while, and then spent a couple of hours rereading articles and letters that I hadn’t looked at in a long time. It made me sadder than I realized it would. . . .

Mark was a Scout Sniper (of which he was very proud), assigned to the 3/4 [Third Battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment] based in Twenty Nine Palms, CA. . . . Mark served as the spotter for the sniper team and was also the Humvee driver. The 3/4 crossed into Iraq on March 20, 2003. On April 3, they were sent to the city of Al Kut, where there were reported to be enemy fedayeen. The job of the 3/4 was to suppress any resistance in the city. The convoy came to a stretch in the road with a palm grove on the right and a sandy patch on the left. After the tanks had passed, the battalion was ambushed with machine guns and RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] from the palm grove.

An amtrac [amphibious vehicle] pulled to the side of the road at a 45-degree angle, and Mark parked the Humvee behind the amtrac. The area was filled with smoke from all the gunfire. The Sgt. Major told Mark to get his M203 (hybrid M16 and single-shot grenade launcher) and led him to the rear of the amtrac. He told Mark to "take out" the RPK (no idea what that is) firing out of a bunker at the far end of the grove. Mark loaded the weapon, stepped out from behind the amtrac, and fired at the target. He then stepped back behind the amtrac to reload. I'm not sure how many grenades he launched that way. After reloading when he stepped out from behind the amtrac to fire again, an Iraqi in the grove sprayed a burst of machine-gun fire and hit Mark below his Kevlar vest. At first he wasn't sure what happened, and then fell to the ground. The Sgt. Major, who was about 15 yards away behind a mound of dirt, ran over and dragged him behind the mound of dirt. Mark was "bitching about how he couldn't believe he had been hit." The Sgt. Major and the medic loosened his clothes and saw two holes in his abdomen (not much blood). Mark was in pain but coherent.

While waiting for a Humvee to evacuate Mark to the aid station, the Sgt. Major said, “Look on the bright side, Evnin, you won’t have to put up with me anymore.” Mark’s response was, “Sgt. Major, you’re the biggest asshole I’ve ever worked for.” I think he said it to break the tension, and to make the Sgt. Major feel better. He also probably said it because he could get away with it, and it would be a great story to tell the guys later . . .

Mark was evacuated to the aid station, where Chaplain Grove of the 3/4 saw Mark and read the Jewish prayers over him. As he finished the first prayer, Mark said, “Good to go, Chaplain.” I think that Mark could sense the chaplain’s nervousness and unfamiliarity with the Jewish prayer, and he wanted to reassure him that all was okay. As the Chaplain began reading the 23rd Psalm, Mark interrupted to reassure him (and probably himself), and said, “I’m not going to die.” I think that to the last he didn’t want to worry anyone. He always had a very kind soul.

Frank, I don’t know if Mark was a “hero.” He did what he was asked to do, and he did it without hesitation, as did many Marines, knowing that the firefight was dangerous. Maybe that is heroic. It certainly was bravery, and honor and duty. Part of the citation for his medal says, that, “Corporal Evnin’s initiative, perseverance, and total dedication to duty reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.”

Frank, one more thing—the Sgt. Major told me that during the war, one of his jobs was to drive around to see where the action was, and do some reconnaissance. He would have Mark pull over to the side of the road, and tell him to stay with the Humvee, in part to protect it. . . . Frequently he

would turn around to find Mark following him. When he asked Mark what the hell he was doing, Mark would explain that he thought it was important to watch the Sgt. Major's back, more than watching the Humvee. I think that was brave. Mark was doing something potentially dangerous that was not asked of him.

Okay, I'm done. No more e-mails tonight. I'm going to my book club and going to try to relax.

Mindy

When the officer came to her door with the news that Mark was dead, Mindy, seeing the desperate sadness stamped on the young Marine's face, reached out to him. Before he could break the news she said, "This must be so terribly hard for you to do. Thank you."

Has the media done all it can to introduce the American public to people like Mark and Mindy Evin? It seems to us that we need to know more about women like Mindy who comforted a frightened young Marine in her own moment of supreme anguish. We need to know that her dying son tried to help a nervous chaplain as he read a prayer over him. We need to know these things, not because they glorify war—they don't—or boost the standing of political leaders, but because Mindy's and Mark's lives give us a glimpse of grace.

We think that Mindy Evin has written the best description of what service is: "I don't know if Mark was a 'hero.' He did what he was asked to do, and he did it without hesitation . . . knowing that the firefight was dangerous. Maybe that is heroic. It certainly was bravery, and honor and duty."



There are a number of journalists who write about the military with substance and understanding—columnists William Safire, George Will, and Thomas Friedman leap to mind; and of course *Washington*

Post writer Thomas Ricks, not to mention Michael M. Phillips of the *Wall Street Journal*. And *Rolling Stone* magazine writers have written thoughtful and compelling stories about West Point and the Iraq War.³⁴

Ricks wrote a well-received book about the Marine Corps, spending enough time with a platoon going through boot camp that he is practically an honorary Marine. Two of Ricks's journalism mentors were former Marines. In fact, many of the journalists who seem to "get" the military—such as David Lipsky, the author of *Absolutely American*, about four years at West Point, and Evan Wright, author of *Generation Kill*, about a platoon of recon Marines in Iraq—are the ones who've spent the most personal time with our men and women. But how many of today's journalists, lacking mentors like Ricks's or personal experience like Lipsky's and Wright's or actual time in uniform, will bring that insight to their coverage of world affairs?

Wall Street Journal staff reporter Michael M. Phillips was embedded with the Third Battalion, Seventh Marines in Iraq and did four tours with them. As a result of this very personal connection he was deeply moved when he heard that Jason Dunham, a twenty-two-year-old corporal from the one-stoplight town of Scio, New York, died after shielding his comrades from a grenade.

When Michael Phillips wrote Jason Dunham's story, and the stories of all the incredibly selfless military personnel, medics, soldiers, and nurses, who tried to save Jason Dunham's life, the *Journal* did indeed give it page-one treatment. When Frank asked Michael Phillips about the reaction to the story, he told Frank that his paper got over three hundred e-mails and letters.

Evidently there is a hunger for inspiring information about those

34. David Lipsky, *Absolutely American: Four Years at West Point* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003); Evan Wright, *Generation Kill* (New York: Putnam, 2004).

we pay lip service to as "our best young men and women" but rarely get to know. The public reaction was so strong that Broadway Books contacted Michael Phillips and asked him to turn the story into a book, *The Gift of Valor*.

The Gift of Valor is a piece of extraordinary wartime writing. It is not about politics but about character, the character of a young American of whom we can all be proud. It is a study in existential courage that gives new meaning to the word *sacrifice*.

Journalists such as Michael Phillips and the others we have just mentioned are the exceptions. The more usual discomfort with discussing heroism also shows in discussions about military recruiting. The papers all eagerly cover shortfalls. But they didn't seem to be able to explain why even in the midst of the Iraq War's growing unpopularity in 2005, and in spite of the Army shortfalls in recruiting of new soldiers, the reenlistment numbers for all the services went up.

Words like *honor*, *valor*, *heroism*, *selflessness*, *loyalty*, don't easily find their way onto the pages of our leading newspapers, at least not unless they are bracketed by quotation marks. But, "re-upping" bonuses aside, the values implicit in those rarely used words seem to us to be the only good explanation of why so many of our war-weary troops renewed their military commitment and wouldn't leave their brothers and sisters to fight on alone, even in an unpopular war. Again, where are the many stories of the soldiers who canceled long-term plans to start college or return to civilian life so they could reenlist for altruistic reasons?

In mid-2005 the *New York Times* editorialized about the Army's recruiting problems, "The Army's inability to recruit enough soldiers to sustain its worldwide commitments is already serious, becoming alarming, and poses a real threat to the future of America's all-volunteer military. That should be ringing bells in the Congress and the country and creating intense political pressure to address the

underlying problems. They range from intolerable strains on morale and readiness as a result of having too few troops in Iraq to absurd and offensive policies that limit the Army's ability to make full use of its female soldiers and openly gay men and women wanting to serve their country."

The *Times* concludes the editorial, "Instead of managing its recruitment numbers and playing dangerous games with quality standards, the Army needs to level with the public and Congress about what it will take to meet the nation's defense needs and restore the health of the volunteer force that has served America well."

Here's what the *Times* might logically have been expected to conclude: "The all-volunteer force is not serving our country well. It is allowing the most privileged Americans to do in our country what Europeans have been accused by Americans of doing for the last fifty years: hiding behind the American military while profiting from it, yet contributing little to our common defense. Instead of managing its recruitment numbers and playing dangerous games with quality standards, the Army needs to call upon America's upper middle classes and upper classes to begin shouldering their responsibility and to volunteer proportionate to their numbers. In that spirit, the *New York Times* has invited recruiters to meet with those of us at the paper who are physically and age-qualified to serve."

Seems laughably impossible, doesn't it? Why? Perhaps for the same reason that it might have seemed impossible in 1800 for there to be a Jewish president of Harvard or in 1959 for there to be a black editor at the *New York Times*. Assumptions about class, race, gender, and other social constructs aren't examined until they are questioned, and people who think they are the most enlightened often seem to have the biggest unaddressed prejudicial assumptions.

To some enterprising writer out there, may we suggest a Pulitzer-caliber series of in-depth pieces comparing the family histories of

military service and nonservice in the Bush dynasty, the Sulzberger family (owners of the *New York Times*), and the Kennedy clan. It is instructive to see that all the Kennedy brothers served but none of the Kennedy cousins did, and that Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, chairman of the *Times*, served but none of his children or grandchildren did, and that Bush senior served with great distinction but none of the Bush grandchildren have volunteered.

Here's the closing paragraph: "The collective answer of our elites, of the right, left, and center, to John F. Kennedy's challenge 'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country,' seems to be, 'Not much!' when it comes to the post-Vietnam privileged classes' willingness to serve our country in our military."

THE MOVIES

What sort of movies have fueled and reinforced the privileged classes' view of the military over the last several decades since Vietnam? There have been many recent films and TV series, such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*, that have painted an inspiring portrait of military service. But for many Americans who have no direct exposure to the military, other important movies have served as justification for negative feelings about this institution. Here is a short list—in no particular order—of ones that strike us as particularly significant:

American Beauty
Apocalypse Now
Born on the Fourth of July
The Deer Hunter
Fahrenheit 9/11
Full Metal Jacket

The Great Santini
Platoon
The Thin Red Line

In *Full Metal Jacket* a sadistic drill instructor drives one recruit to suicide and prepares the rest to become hardened killers in what is portrayed as a bankrupt war. In *Born on the Fourth of July* the “good” soldiers are dissidents. In *Platoon* the men who serve are either sensitive victims or butchers. In *Apocalypse Now* military men are again victims or deranged killers serving an evil system. *The Deer Hunter* portrays the communists in Vietnam as evil (the movie was therefore picketed at the Oscars by Jane Fonda) but also shows American soldiers and their families being wrecked by their association with the military, which is exemplified in one soldier’s playing Russian roulette till he kills himself. In *The Thin Red Line* the military is shown squandering the lives of soldiers (victims again). The hero is an officer who will not send his men into battle against the Japanese. In *American Beauty* the villain is a repressed gay psychopathic former Marine colonel. His military memorabilia mingles with Nazi artifacts. (Nothing too subtle!) In *The Great Santini* Robert Duvall gives a stunningly memorable performance as a Marine pilot. He is the quintessential hard-ass, action-craving Marine. His love of the Corps and his addiction to action makes him a bad father, out of touch with his family. In the last analysis, the film reinforces a certain cliché: the military is full of people driven by some sort of inner demon to live too fast, too hard, people out of touch with the kinder, gentler side of life.

The movies listed above make some valid points about the banality of service and about war, suffering, and patriotism that verges on jingoism. They portray situations that do arise in war. Sometimes wounded prisoners do get shot. Sometimes atrocities occur. Some warriors are hard cases. Some generals don’t give a damn about their

men and women. And many men and women who have served and fought find some truth in several or all of these movies.

But taken together these films and many, many more besides, have reinforced a generation's highly politicized and jaded view of the military as a place where only victims and/or sadists serve the illegitimate ends of one or another despised administration. Above all, the fundamental need for military service is never acknowledged.

Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* serves as an example of the aggregate attitudes displayed in all the films we mention above. Moore "sympathizes" with our military men and women as exploited victims taken for a ride by callous or stupid recruiters manipulating recruits' poverty or lack of education. Why would anyone join who had a scholarship to college, medical benefits, or a good union job?

Moore edits in out-of-context footage of jumpy teenagers in uniform talking about the music they listen to when they are getting shot at and shooting back. Macho swaggering semiliterate statements from a few immature soldiers are taken out of context, a context where they were trying to pump themselves up to face battle. Moore's message: the military is a crude, violent place full of teenage Neanderthals, war is always wrong and the only good people in the military were tricked into joining, the rest are insensitive killers.

THE MILITARY—SURROGATE FOR THE CULTURE WARS

For the opinion makers and most of our political leadership on the left or right, service is no longer thought of as the common duty of all citizens. More often than not when the elites take notice, the military is used as a surrogate to fight larger political and culture-war battles.

The so-called swift boat veterans did nothing to enhance the reputation of the military as an institution above politics by using footage of Vietnam in their anti-John Kerry commercials, and by

trying to rope other veterans into their transparent political crusade. And President Bush and his slick media machine did not honor the military when they used men in uniform as a good backdrop for glib photo ops.

The military is not a political creature of the right or left. (On which, more later.) It is made up of real human beings; good, bad, and all points in between, just like the rest of the country. And the military has always been all-too human, as the many atrocities our side committed even in the “good war”—World War II—prove. But all that does not answer these questions: Do we need a military? If we do, who should serve? If our men and women in uniform are not seen as all of our sons and daughters, then whose are they? Have we lost a sense of community, and perhaps of citizenship as well?