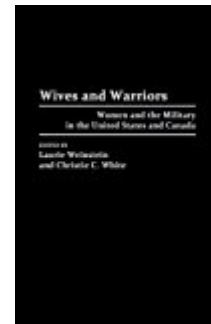




Laurie Lee Weinstein, Christie C. White, eds. *Wives and Warriors: Women and the Military in the United States and Canada*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1997. xix + 252 pp. \$59.95 (cloth);\$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89789-491-3.



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Less Than the Sum of its Parts

Editing a collection of articles is one of the most difficult challenges in academia. Editors must assemble a team of talented authors willing to remain focused on a coherent theme, and then unite their work with judicious editing and clear introductions. The work can be intensely frustrating, because editors are responsible for the canvas on which their contributors “paint” while enjoying little of the control over paint selection and style they would exercise if painting themselves. At their best, editors are the keystone arch of anthologies, the creators of seamless connections between disparate pieces whose cumulative effect is to make demonstrable contributions to the larger body of academic literature. At their worst, editors lend only confusion to amalgamations of scholarship better left as independent articles or fully developed into monographs.

While composed of a handful of very meaningful articles, *Wives and Warriors: Women in the Military in the United States and Canada* falls somewhere in the middle of those extremes. Edited by Laurie Weinstein and Christie C. White, *Wives and Warriors* is a collection of ten chapters organized by theme into three parts: “Wives,” “Warriors,” and “Warriors Under Fire.” Contributors represent a wide variety of academic back-

grounds and life experience, giving the book an interestingly broad approach to the problems faced by women in the military. Unfortunately, the book also contains an equally broad assortment of topics, and the ensuing diffusion of scholarly effort produces a cumulative effect that is meek at best.

The diffusion and lack of direction are apparent from the very beginning. In her forward, Cynthia Enloe stresses the importance of a “feminist research approach” (p. xi) in producing new insights into military policies and problems around the world, but this promising insight is allowed to drift away unexplored. The only attempt at tying the diverse articles together comes in the introduction, where Laurie Weinstein writes, “In the pages that follow we examine how the military controls women and polices gender lines” (p. xviii). The statement is hardly sufficient to explain what the articles that follow all have in common, or why they contribute new insights into the dynamic interaction between women and the military in the United States and Canada. In short, we are never told what need the book meets in the scholarly world.

Wives and Warriors is also colored by weak introduc-

tions to the various parts of the book and a tendency in all but the best articles to avoid balance and treat the military as if it exists in a patriarchal vacuum barely affected by culture, civilian control, or larger governmental policy. No positive experiences of women in the military are related. No evidence is presented of instances where men stepped forward as advocates of women in the military or as prosecutors of other men accused of harassment or abuse. The very worst example of one-sided analysis comes in Chapter One, where Laurie Weinstein and Helen Mederer suggest civilian women as a group are too ignorant to understand the choices they make when marrying male Naval officers. As they write, "if wives really recognized the heavy, institutionalized demands placed up them by the military; if wives realized they had no choice either to follow their career paths or to stay home and be mothers; if wives learned that their feelings of power were only institutionalized duties requiring them to make all the decisions in their marriages; then, we believe, Navy officers' wives might not be so willing to go along for the military ride" (p. 15). Are all Navy wives so naive and/or powerless? We are told such women are motivated by "pragmatism, vicarious achievement, or denial" (p. 14). Certainly there is truth to that statement, but the accompanying truth that some women make their own deliberate, informed choices and/or manage to balance the demands of marriage in a military life with their own careers is completely ignored.

Despite these shortcomings, *Wives and Warriors* is hardly without high points. Part One focuses on wives and families within the military, and the third chapter provides interesting insights into how and why military identities and communities are so distinct, as well as the ways military regulations integrate families into a virtual world largely cut off from civilian life. Entitled "Gender, the Military, and Military Family Support," the article by Deborah Harrison and Lucie Laliberte discusses gender polarity, the role of family and support groups, and efforts by Canadian women to expand the power they have over their lives on Canadian Force bases.

Part Two also contains interesting work and is easily the high point of Weinstein and White's collection. There is a chapter by Abigail E. Adams examining the Virginia Military Institute from an anthropologist's perspective, one by Georgia Clark Sadler on changes in military policies affecting women after the Persian Gulf War, and a third by Lucinda Joy Peach discussing theoretical feminist disputes over the issue of women in direct combat. Of these, Sadler's is the strongest. She provides a historical context within which to view the changes in mili-

tary policy in the wake of Desert Storm, explaining how and why changes were made and discussing the pros and cons of those changes in the eyes of policy makers. Her analysis is both balanced and well researched, and it provides a thorough discussion of the many points raised in her essay. Lucinda Peach's article is also compelling. She highlights the divisions between those feminists who believe in an "ethic of care" (women are inherently life-givers and should not be in the business of taking life in combat) with those who argue for an "ethic of justice" (women have a right to equal treatment under the law, and that includes their right to serve in any job in the military) (p. 100). I have dramatically over-simplified the arguments here, but Peach does a good job of explaining their pros and cons in detail and then promoting an alternative ethic which is both practical, balanced, and completely logical.

In Part Three, *Wives* examines gender and racial relations in both the U.S. and Canadian armed forces. This section is unfortunately weak, relying too much on anecdotal evidence and assertion. Chapter Ten, however, contains an interesting and provocative look at the ways the post Cold War drawdown in the size of U.S. military forces has impacted minority groups in the military. Entitled "Policing the U.S. Military's Race and Gender Lines" and written by Francine D'Amico, the article contains a wealth of statistical evidence demonstrating the adverse effects of the drawdown on minorities, particularly African Americans and Hispanics. D'Amico argues "the cut in the number and proportion of African Americans suggests that this differential reflects a deliberate policy to change the racial-ethnic composition of the armed forces" (p. 209). The statement is extreme, and D'Amico hardly proves it in full. In particular, she fails to discuss the ways in which overall governmental policy and American culture drive changes in force structure as well, and she ignores the possibility that jobs in which many minorities are predominant were cut for reasons beyond discrimination. Certainly sexism and racism continue to be real problems for the military, but a more balanced analysis would have strengthened her claims. Still, the article is thought-provoking and certainly worth consideration.

Ultimately, *Wives and Warriors* is a limited anthology. Very little new evidence is presented, and the approach of the book is so scattered as to make it difficult for most educators to integrate into their classrooms. It does, however, contain an excellent bibliography at the end of each chapter and is therefore recommended to researchers and to specialists interested in one or another of the individ-

ual chapters.

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