

Judith Stiehm, ed.. *It's Our Military Too! Women and the U.S. Military*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996. 309 pages \$83.50, cloth, ISBN 978-1-56639-455-0.



Reviewed by Ilene Feinman

Published on H-Minerva (April, 1999)

Smiling confidently out at me from the front cover of this anthology is a woman described as "The Navy's first black female naval flight officer [no name]." The back cover sports a smaller picture captioned "Water delivery truck escort talks with Rwandans during peacekeeping mission." This second soldier is neither identified by name, race, or gender, but appears to be a light-skinned woman. My first impressions are contradictory at best. I am excited by the powerful image of a woman of color on the front, in uniform, and I am confused by the unmarked woman on the back. In hindsight I am tempted to read these pictures through two of the essayists' analyses that are contained between them: Susan Jeffords' "Telling the War Story," which informs us that film is a critical meaning-maker for our understandings of war; and Miriam Cooke, who tells us that "Since women are no longer everywhere systematically excluded from the military and war, the War Story will eventually have to take account of them" (p. 255). Through their use of the "War Story" concept I would suggest that this book is about telling a new War Story that anticipates a "democratization" of the United States military such that

straight and lesbian women of all colors have equal access to martial service.

Stiehm tells us that her purpose in collecting the essays in this book is to develop our understandings of the military because "it is our military, and we have responsibility for what it is and what it does ... The purpose of this book is to encourage civilians, especially women civilians, to accept and exercise that responsibility" (p. ix). To achieve this goal, of encouraging civilians to accept and exercise responsibility over the military, Stiehm has constructed the book out of three constituent parts: "Voices and Facts," "History and Issues," and "Reflection and Speculation." Each of these sections has several essays in it which purport to tell us the way it is for women in this man's military and the way it might, or should, be with women fully empowered in the military.

The essays themselves, as Stiehm tells us, come out of a set of conferences convened over a several year period in the early 1990s. During this time, many conferences, essays, and book projects engaged the issues embedded in women and the military and militarism. I have suggested else-

where[1] that these conversations have tended toward the supposition that the right thing to do is fight for full and equal access to the military for women. What they often leave behind, as in this volume, is the question of whether, in the first place, a military belongs in a democracy. In part, this has happened because feminist antimilitarists have been conversing elsewhere. Critiques of the military by feminist antimilitarists have been about its inherent masculinism and its usage of women in traditional roles to support its militarism.[2] Feminist antimilitarists have not wanted to advocate for women in the military any more than they would for men in the military.

On the other hand, critiques of, and commentary on, the military by egalitarian, or equal rights, feminists have been geared toward disabusing the military of its masculinism (akin to arguments to disabuse the military of its racism) so that women can effectively participate. Thus the sections of the book serve this purpose by exploring what it might take to fully gender integrate the military. Concerns regarding women in the U.S. military--the presumptive object of the book given the cover colors and the majority of the essays, although Miriam Cooke discusses Croatia and Lebanon--are articulated to be for women of varied sexualities, and for the issues of African American women in the military. No other women of color are discussed in relation to the U.S. military.

In the first section, "Voices and Facts," first hand accounts tell us: that women and men can do the same jobs, they are just socialized differently and this can be changed (Cornum); that some women join up to find themselves and then find themselves in a masculinist environment and if they are lesbian then they also stay closeted because "duty, honor, country" are heterosexist in construction (Solms, which is the author's pseudonym); that West Point is a "model for understanding male fear of military women and female desire for sexualized military power" (Mitchell,

pseudonym, p. 41) and moreover, that it is a place of competition for the phallus where women challenge the easy association of phallus to soldier (Mitchell, p. 54). At the end of this section Stiehm iterates the historical facts of women's presence in the military to 1995.

The second section is entitled "History and Issues." Connie Reeves presents a history of women's nursing roles from the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War. In her view, "[w]omen have always seen a need to care for men in battle" (p. 111). This argument might give feminist readers pause since it serves precisely to reinscribe women's monolithic and gender traditional military role, which has been challenged by histories of women incognito as soldiers. Her important intent is to argue that nurses have always been in harms way, and therefore, "military nurses are invisible soldiers" (p. 112). Brenda Moore, in the only essay inflecting U.S. military women's gender with race, deconstructs the progressivist story of women in the military by describing African American women's willingness to perform martial service in order to achieve full citizenship and post-war career opportunities. Moore tells us that there are disproportionate numbers of African American women in the services, because of more opportunities for African American women to advance in the military than in the civilian economy. This means that drawdowns will disproportionately negatively effect these women, interestingly unlike the pictorial representation that frames the book. Nina Richman-Loo and Rachel Weber tells us that technology is not gender neutral and that without developing technologies that address women and men normed together, women will continue to find limitations (seemingly benign) on their access to high technologized fighter equipment. In the next essay, Peach tells us that "'combat' is the ideological core of the military" (p. 158) and that gender ideology continues to shape both arguments against women in the military and peace activist arguments that rely on the substantiation of gendered roles to show us how men and

women relate to war. She develops a framework of ethical approaches to the military and suggests, through an overly broad mapping of scholars to positions, that these each are flawed in their reliance on gendered norms to construct their arguments. In her estimation the answer is to create a gender neutral approach to the military so that more women will be encouraged to join. The final essay in this section is by MC Devilbiss, in the form of a "military brief" which asserts that the future role of women in the military can be ascertained by reviewing past progress. She then reviews the traditional military assessment of the military which is that it has changed from offensive (War Department) to defensive (Defense Department) and is now moving toward a mixture of defense and humanitarian aid, which she suggests will be called "Profensive" and more amenable to women's presence and particular contributions, though it is not clear in the essay what difference women hold. Students of U.S. militarism will probably wonder what happened to the critique of the U.S. military that understands the name changes as rhetorical, and the mission of the U.S. military consistently interventive in its own best interests.

In Part III, "Reflections and Speculation," the authors analyze the masculinism of the military and the possibilities for its democratization. Carol Burke develops her wonderful folklore study of the culture at West Point, its cadences (horrifically masculinist and graphically violent), and the issues of what she calls "pernicious cohesion, the closing-of-ranks that thwarts change" (p. 218). Susan Jeffords' essay "Telling the War Story," suggests that films have the power to shape our collective understandings of military practice and the meanings of wars and warriors. Her focus is on the changing approaches to the Vietnam War and she remarks the ways that we have explored the meanings of masculinity and masculine heroism, of race and ethnic difference (white male soldiers consistently rescuing children of color), and ideas about United States' citizenship. Jeffords

suggest that more recent women military type heroines (usually cast in future fantasies) achieve their heroism through mimicry of men's roles. I would suggest that Linda Hamilton in *Terminator II*, Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens* and *Aliens III*, and the two recent military women films: *GI Jane* and *Courage Under Fire* present more complex relationships to the performance of military heroism. Miriam Cooke's essay on the telling of the war story works from the idea that "war and gender ... organize the world dyadically" and thus "their reconception and rearticulation may become the instrument for recreating the world" (p. 236).

The question then, is how the war story is changing and how we would or should intervene and participate in that change. Stiehm, in the closing essay, tells us that the way to go about this is to bring "civilian mind" together with "military mind" in order to make "might" and "right" congruous (p. 290). This argument suggests, and of course this is the framework of the book overall, that what is needed is to develop a military that is part of the democracy, that is constructed out of the democracy and through which civilians express their needs, desires, and best interests. Hopefully, those would look like peace as an active pursuit.

Overall, the book presents us with a sampling of women's experiences inside the military as it stands, a sense of some of the ways that masculinism inheres in its blatant (cadences) and its subtle (technology that isn't gender neutral) forms internally, and finally the ways that the military is regenerated culturally through popular media such as film and photographic documentary of war. Stiehm's intent is to encourage civilian women to engage the issues of the military and contribute to its shape and function. In this way the book makes an important contribution to our thinking about women and the military. With this field of study proliferating before and after this book's publication its contribution is to add material for

consideration and to present some first hand accounts therein.

Notes:

[1]. *Citizenship Rites: Feminist Soldiers and Feminist Antimilitarists* forthcoming, New York University Press. Note: other than taking the liberty of citing my own work to substantiate my argument, I am providing citation commentary consistent with the date of the book being reviewed, thus I will not include more recent works than 1996, when this book was published.

[2]. A sampling of these readings would include the first major reader in feminist antimilitarism Pam McAllister, ed. *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982); Sara Ruddick, "Pacifying the Forces: Drafting women in the interests of peace," *Signs* No. 8. (1983); Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King *Rocking the Ship of State* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989); Annette Fuentes, "Women Warriors?: Equality, Yes- Militarism, No." *The Nation* (October 28, 1991); Cynthia Enloe *"The Politics of Constructing the American Woman Soldier as a Professionalized 'First Class Citizen': Some Lessons from the Gulf War,"* *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military* Vol. X, No.1 (Spring 1992):14-31, and *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

This review was commissioned by Reina Pennington for H-Minerva.

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Citation: Ilene Feinman. Review of Stiehm, Judith, ed. *It's Our Military Too! Women and the U.S. Military*. H-Minerva, H-Net Reviews. April, 1999.

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