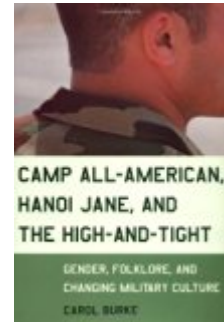


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Carol Burke. *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004. 264 pp. \$26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8070-4660-9.

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## The Secret World under the Transparent Rock

With scandal after scandal rocking the military and revelations of abuse and violence against the women in its midst, after years of “sensitivity training,” “cultural awareness,” and solemn pronouncements of Zero Tolerance from the top, it seems appropriate to ask, why. Why has so little, or perhaps nothing, changed?

Many learned and academic discussions have given the answer with a variation of “it is the culture.” However, until this book, few studies have investigated the premise on a thorough, historically supported basis. Herein lies the crux of the matter; until someone puts forth the effort to pull all the pieces together, to research the information from the varied sources, and to analyze the data, the statements are merely speculative and anecdotal. Oddly, although many works treat some parts, aspects, or facets of the overall issue, few address the entire range of investigatory potential inherent in military culture overall. This fact has been a glaring deficiency in the study of cause and effect concerning the gender-culture context of the military ethos and the culture of misogyny and violence so characteristic of the armed forces. Burke has addressed this issue at long last.

In spite of the horrendous title, Burke’s work is an eminently readable, eye-opening, yet thoroughly grounded scholarly tour-de-force. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the study of any part of military culture and its impact on gender issues, and in this reviewer’s opinion, it will become the seminal work on the topic. No serious researcher can afford to

ignore Burke’s sharp analytical exploration of just how much women are marginalized, despised and targeted for abuse in training settings engineered to produce soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines for the active armed forces.

The unfortunate title uses phrases peculiar to the military culture and illustrates aspects so indicative of the word “military” that Burke has been compelled to explain them in the preface. “Camp All-American” refers to the fabled Ft. Bragg Jump School training camp where super-macho paratroopers are morphed into the elite 82nd Airborne and where legend, tradition, and myth combine into a formidable factory for producing misogynists. The first chapter explores the largely hidden anti-female attitudes that permeate all military basic and advanced specialty training designed to “turn boys into men.” “Hanoi Jane” refers to Jane Fonda who, as a very young anti-war activist, traveled to Vietnam and made what were largely perceived as anti-American statements. Her fame and gender transformed her relatively mild transgressions into folklore of mythic proportions, which live on today in spite of all efforts to debunk the stories that grew out of the Vietnam War. The final phrase, “the high-and-tight” refers to the characteristic haircut of military men, shaved on the sides with only a strip of hair on the top of the head, either lying close to the scalp or cut extremely short. This easily identifiable haircut marks the military man as surely as the uniform and has come to represent the epitome of the squared-away masculinity of the warrior, certainly an exclusionary image when it comes to women.

The range of Burke's explorations is wide as she peers into the sometimes hidden and murky depths of various parts of military life. Some of the revelations of the extraordinarily virulent threads of misogyny interwoven inextricably into military culture are shocking and even sickening. That these horrendous things exist in the darkest, most secretive wormholes of training and military everyday life, in spite of official edicts intended to stamp them out, is an indictment of the entire system. Even the terminology employed by cadets at the supposedly strict and genteel military academies is disgusting and more than conducive to hatred of all things even remotely female.

Burke follows a complicated skein of misogyny to the highest levels of the military hierarchy and demonstrates how early training nurtures attitudes of contempt and loathing toward women in the military, as well as women and girls in general. This hatred (and fear) is so ingrained that anyone who tries to change the status quo on any meaningful level is made ineffective and eventually powerless (pp.22-23, 125-146). She discusses the tragedy of the great naval leader, Admiral Jeremy Boorda, the only man to rise from the enlisted ranks to the acme of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations. A man of honor so dedicated to the elimination of hatred and discrimination against women in the Navy, he incurred the wrath of some of the most powerful of the Old Guard, far right conservatives who would stop at nothing to eliminate him and his philosophy. Boorda killed himself when a particularly egregious campaign of lies was waged against him and he felt honor-bound to commit suicide to remove the stain from his beloved Navy. He left a heartbreaking letter to his sailors, telling them he could not live with the possibility that he might have brought dishonor upon them. Those who forced him to that point are still striving mightily to destroy the concepts they so loathe, including the full equality of women in the military (pp. xvi-xvii, 125-147).

A particularly interesting section of the book deals with former Secretary of the Navy James Webb, a virulent misogynist who managed to achieve the most powerful position in the Navy and proceeded to abuse that power to make every effort to remove or at least marginalize women (pp. 20, 43-44, 93-94, 125-129, 131-32, 135-137, 139-144). Thus, Burke illustrates that the hatred extends beyond the military itself and even is found in the civilian overlords. Webb still exerts great influence over military affairs and government, years after his resignation over a disagreement with the direction toward which the Navy was headed, which included a greatly expanded role for

women.

The value of this book lies not only in its unflinching recording of the hatred toward women and how it is made manifest, but in its analysis of the data. Burke is a professional folklorist, and looks at the military through the eyes of a scholar whose background is particularly suited to tackle such a complicated subject. Military culture and lore is so endemic, so rife with misogyny it becomes difficult to select and organize the plethora of information. However, the author succeeds admirably.

Burke states, "the military's culture has come to be at odds with its mission." She asks, "Why should women and homosexuals take the place of the vanquished enemy? Why are rampant misogyny and homophobia countenanced throughout the armed services? Why does the military respond to the accident of gender or sexual preference with more intensity than it responds to the accident of skin color or social class" (p. 21)?

The book ends with a comprehensive look at the current and future way wars will be fought, with an ever-decreasing role for machismo and the traditional warrior culture, already largely obsolete. Technology is gender-neutral, and tomorrow's soldier will be even less dependent upon the gung-ho male characteristics so prized and encouraged in training and military life. Women are performing with excellence and have proven their abilities in every facet of warfare. They are fighting and dying on the battlefields of the Middle East, in spite of being excluded from combat per se. There are no front lines, no behind-the-lines anymore. Burke clearly demonstrates the inappropriateness of the super-male ethos in today's military, while demonstrating equally clearly just how impossible eradicating misogyny has proven to be.

Burke's work is so packed with issues to explore, so dense with topics for further scholarship, that it is particularly difficult to review. She has created a book no serious scholar can overlook in studying the military culture in depth. She has shown how the culture itself breeds and perpetuates gender conflict and tensions and how these things are destroying the future effectiveness and progress of the military.

Since no review is complete without at least some nit-picking, this reviewer does have three small quibbles. One, for some reason Burke ignores the topic of Native American culture of the warrior in her discussion of ethnic groups and their relation to the military, an odd omission, since Native Americans enlist in numbers far out of proportion to their actual numbers in the greater popu-

lation, with a large number of enlistments being in the Marines. Two, there are quite a few typographical errors in the book, at times causing at least momentary confusion. Three, Burke fails to reference some important books that are germane to her own study. She neither appears to have utilized the body of work available in the psychology of killing—although she does address that issue—nor does she appear to have delved into the substantial and growing body of work on women in the military. While the central topics and perspective are not

analogous, they are complementary.

None of the above comments detract from the fact that this book is a superb and long-overdue study of the actual culture of the military within which abuse and discrimination against women occur. The importance of this work and its contribution to the study of women and war cannot be overemphasized. It should be read by every scholar with any interest in gender issues and the military, and it should be utilized as a text in every class of study dealing with the military.

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