

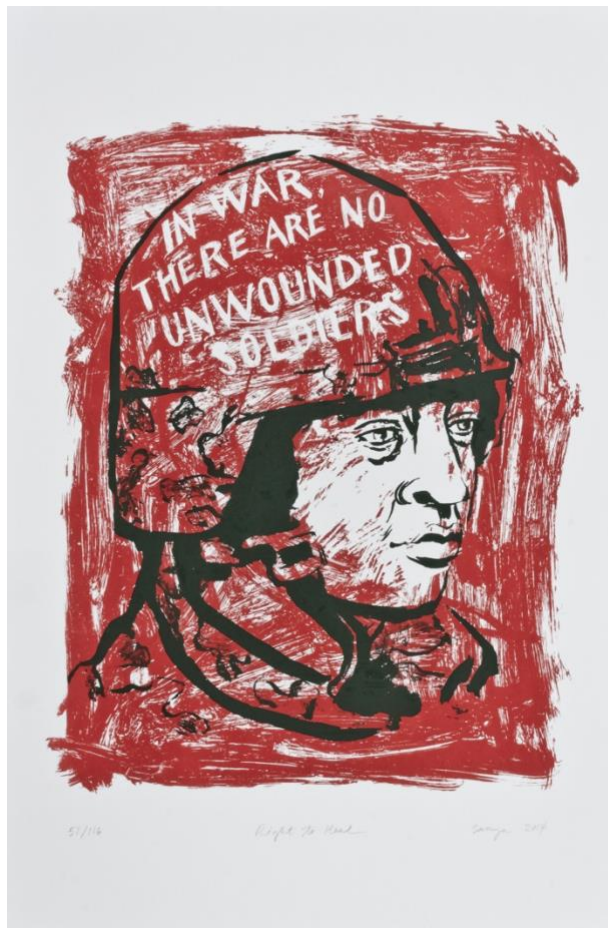
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction

“Resist, Rethink, and Restructure”: Teaching About Capitalism, War, and Empire in a Time of COVID-19

by Jocelyn Wills, Joseph Entin, and Richard Ohmann



"IN WAR THERE ARE NO UNWOUNDED SOLDIERS" BY SANYA HYLAND. THIS IMAGE IS FROM CELEBRATE PEOPLE'S HISTORY/IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR: TEN YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE, A PORTFOLIO THAT CELEBRATED IVAW'S FIRST TEN YEARS AND WAS PRODUCED BY JUSTSEEDS.

"You never had to look at me. I had to look at you.
I know more about you than you know about me.
Not everything that is faced can be changed;
But nothing can be changed until it is faced."

- James A. Baldwin, *Remember This House*, unfinished manuscript; *I Am Not Your Negro*, 2016

"When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?"

- Eleanor Roosevelt, *My Day*, 16 February 1946

As we sat down, corona-cocooned, to write this introduction to *Radical Teacher's* special issue on "Teaching About Capitalism, War, and Empire" during May of 2020, we agreed that the five thought-provoking essays that follow have never seemed more on point, and teaching to the theme more urgent. As if we needed more evidence, COVID-19 has once again exposed both the systemic fragility, inherent instability, and doubling-down cruelty of the capitalist system, as well as the limits of American power and the dysfunctional, destructive, and deadly ways in which the United States and members of its military-industrial-intelligence complex have long responded to global crises: employing code words such as *freedom*, *individual liberty*, *patriotism*, *entrepreneurial innovation*, *mobility*, *democracy*, and especially *defense*, U.S. business elites and their government allies have always had as their ultimate goal the demolition of any and all alternatives to the expansion of capitalism as an economic system and article of faith, no matter the cost.

Coveting the riches of the continent long before independence, the United States made war central to its political-economy and imperial project from the start. Reducing all social relations to the profit motive, settler-colonists saw the indigenous people of the Americas as nothing more than a barrier to expanding the market economy to the Pacific coast and beyond, and African slave labor a means for accumulating wealth for further expansion. Nikhil Pal Singh and others have described this reality as a social and political process that drove Indian removals, settler in-migration, and nativist restrictions, as well as the "afterlives of Atlantic slavery" as the animating features of the United States' rise as a capitalist world power long before the 20th century. Although the United States did not invent capitalism and war, it achieved its independence through the violence of both, and was the first nation-state to enshrine private property rights and a blueprint for empire-building within its founding documents.¹

Reading the U.S. Constitution as an economic document, it becomes obvious that the nation's founders perceived the world through imperial eyes, had the interests of capital ever in view, and codified collaborations with business through a commitment to funding technological innovations, expansion, and war. Thus, rather than freeing

slaves or including protections for labor and democratic impulses, the Constitution and its tertiary land ordinances framed the competitive posturing, real estate speculation, and land grabs that would guide what Marx and Engels described as capitalism's "war of each against all," both among individuals as well as into U.S. domestic and international policies. By the 1820s, those policies included treaties designed to trick and cheat Native Americans into selling their lands when possible, and through force when all other avenues failed. The federal government also sanctioned slave codes and the funding of technologies to enforce them. By the 1840s, it also underwrote and devised land giveaways for railroads—the 19th-century's first modern corporations and high-technology empire builders—and encouraged the development of the telegraph to gather information and surveil dissenters. Federal, state, and local governments, as well as railroads, additionally sent immigration agents, first to Northern Europe, then elsewhere, to lure vulnerable populations who could assist with the American imperial project, drive down wages, and pit racial and ethnic groups against each other just as the founding fathers had pitted poor whites against members of the African diaspora, whether free or enslaved, during the revolutionary era.

From the United States' inception, American policies have ensured constant economic booms and busts, ones that have allowed larger firms to gobble up weaker ones when technology and real estate bubbles inevitably burst. By the 1840s, they had also armed railroads and other corporations with the military might to quell labor and civil rights protests. Regardless of the costs, in human lives and environmental degradation, by the time the U.S. had connected the east with the west coast during 1869, members of the government and their corporate allies had already cast their gaze farther afield, into territories they could use as re-fueling stations for more expansion. On the force of that project during World War II, which by then included the development of the computer, more lethal technologies, and the use of nuclear weapons as other imperial powers crumbled, the United States finally achieved the hegemonic status its elite had craved since the nation's infancy.²

The United States' post-World War II "Super-Power" status also created an opportunity for business elites, the government, and a new throng of technocrats to sell a more fervent and destructive mantra of "American exceptionalism," one that privileged whites over people of color, whether native born or immigrant. Perceiving the world as a zero-sum game, where anyone's gain must come at the expense of someone else, the U.S. government and its corporate allies employed patriotic propaganda so that the government could continue to intervene in the economy to shore up capital, providing unending rationales for increased production, technological innovation, and military spending, as well as upgrades to surveillance capabilities and the creation of corporate-research university clusters, all to serve the country's agenda to remain the dominant economic and military power on Earth.

The Sputnik humiliation during 1957 then provided a rationale for the U.S.'s "heavenly ambition" to militarize and dominate Outer Space. Thus, throughout the second half of

the 20th century, the United States launched military, communications, and earth resources satellites into Space, began the process of systems integration, and engaged in warfare (including proxy wars) that continued to threaten the environment as well as kill and displace millions of people, including but not limited to more than a million civilians who died in the War of American Aggression in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia during the “Cold War.” Learning lessons, about the limitations of the draft and the roving reporters who documented American atrocities, U.S. policymakers ended the first and began plans to “embed” the latter in future wars. An “all-volunteer” military force then allowed the federal government, as well as its members of the military-industrial complex, to target the poor, particularly in communities of color, with recruiting stations. Following the formal dissolution of the USSR on 26 December 1991, the federal government then moved swiftly to commercialize the Internet, deregulate communications and financial industries, and assist in the further liberalization of the global economy, all of which the U.S. planned to control as its systems contractors integrated war, space exploration, surveillance capabilities, and empire-building into larger digital networks. Fast-forward to the 21st century.

While the United States’ forever wars began long before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, that pivotal moment in history, and the U.S. response to it, has become intimately intertwined with both an economy as well as a culture dominated by death. Rather than engaging in diplomacy and other non-military responses to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States rushed to war, and has already spent more than \$6.4 trillion on endless wars and occupations, both of which have killed more than 800,000 people (at least 310,000 of them civilians), displaced millions (the vast majority of them the world’s most vulnerable—indigenous populations, people of color, women and children, the poor), devastated entire regions (through both warfare as well as resource extraction, labor exploitation, and environmental destruction), and helped to fuel the climate crisis (with its carbon “footprint” the largest in the world). In 2015, the Pentagon received 54% in federal discretionary spending (or \$598.5 billion), while Medicare and Health as well as Education netted a paltry 6% each, Energy and the Environment a mere 4%, Science but 3%, and Food and Agriculture just 1%. Four years into the Trump administration, austerity continues at a rapid clip, health and environmental protections have evaporated, and the Pentagon’s discretionary budget has increased.³ In the fiscal year 2020 budget, the Pentagon will receive at least \$750 billion in public funding, where it employs more than 600,000 private contractors both domestic and international. By contrast, spending on global health has declined to about one-seventieth of that number, or just \$11 billion. A recent article in *Forbes* also notes that, despite the focus on Pentagon spending as an economic stimulus, spending on either green infrastructure or healthcare would create nearly two times as many jobs as the military or its private contractors create. Other studies additionally find that spending on education (and the arts) would create even more.⁴

In a society governed by politicians whose knee-jerk reaction to environmental catastrophes, healthcare crises, poverty, and other non-military challenges is a call to war and who view peaceful protests yet another barrier to the interests of capital, it should come as no surprise that, in the middle of a global pandemic, imperialism remains a higher priority than human health, that global competition has hindered the cooperation necessary to save lives, and that the United States has acquired the dubious distinction of being “first in military spending” and “last in our COVID-19 response.” While war profiteers were among the first to receive bail-outs, and American billionaires have continued to increase their wealth on the profits of disaster capitalism, by the first week of May, news outlets reported that at least 38 million Americans had lost their jobs (and healthcare), food and housing insecurity had mounted at alarming rates, and COVID’s death toll in the United States alone had already surpassed the number of American lives lost in 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined by more than a factor of four. As deaths in the United States neared 100,000 over the Memorial Day weekend, TrumpDeathClock.com reported that some 59,000 of those deaths occurred due to the Trump administration’s inaction, dithering, and distractions. The U.S. failure to act in ways appropriate to the pandemic is not just about “us”: it has had ripple effects across the globe, where millions have suffered and will continue to die from the adverse consequences of the U.S. obsession with capital accumulation, war, and empire, no matter the cost. So much for the “greatest economy” and “nation” on Earth.⁵

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Rather than prioritizing coronavirus briefings centered on the language of health and well-being, compassion and empathy for the victims (disproportionately found in communities of color and among Native Americans and the working poor), and the need for international cooperation, robust physical distancing, and solidarity with front-line workers while scientists seek a cure, U.S. policymakers, government officials, and members of the mainstream media quickly followed the lead of the White House, invoking age-old “war” tropes to talk about meeting the COVID-19 challenge (a framing as inappropriate as previous U.S. Wars on “Poverty,” “Drugs,” and “Climate Change,” to name but three). They have also hailed capitalist production and consumption as the only way forward: that “return to normalcy” that government officials and business elites have long sold. Initially calling the virus a “hoax,” then something that would magically disappear, Trump quickly pivoted to the virus as the “invisible enemy” that came from the “other” in China, an “enemy” of the U.S. economy.

Side-lining epidemiologists and other health specialists, particularly when they reminded all of us about U.S. incompetence, Trump trotted out the usual suspects—military commanders, corporate CEOs, and himself, none of whom have any expertise in finding a cure but who promise to “wage a war” against the pandemic so everyone can “get back to work.” Trump, then Congress, also invoked a “Cold War” relic: the “Defense Production Act,” to “mobilize” the nation to make up for shortages in medical supplies and personal protective equipment that the government failed to provide and no large U.S. corporation seemed able to produce because it had few incentives to do so. The U.S. military proved itself incompetent as well. Among other things, the Pentagon and its agencies and departments have spent millions of dollars on fly-overs to salute doctors and nurses rather than helping them, steaming ships to ports that did little more than take up dock space, conducting raids on vulnerable populations, keeping children in cages, and attempting to silence those who alerted top commanders that COVID-19 was overwhelming and killing military personnel. Trump once again doubled down: unveiling “Operation Warp Speed” and a new flag for his “Space Force,” embracing NASA’s latest space launch as a “MAGA moment,” and signaling that his administration plans to conduct the United States’ first nuclear test since 1992. Although the U.S. media has criticized some of these moves, they continue to applaud space exploration, obscuring its linkages to the U.S. military and its war-making and surveillance contractors. Over the past fifty years, that “exploration” has both escalated the commercialization and militarization of Outer Space, as well as created dangerous orbital debris. Together, these too threaten the sustainability of the Earth and its people.⁶

Such posturing, mismanagement, and inability to focus on the pandemic have confirmed to the world that the U.S. is a hegemon in a downward trajectory, one that can still inflict great violence across the world and beyond but remains ill-equipped to meet its domestic never mind international obligations. If ever there was a time to teach the fraught and interconnected themes of capitalism, war, and empire, it is now.

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Although the pandemic has created new challenges, threats, and uncertainties, the scale of the United States’ inability to deal with the exigencies of the moment presents an opportunity for progressive educators. In a recent issue of *Dollars and Sense*, Richard D. Wolff reminds us that the coronavirus is, at its core, a capitalist crisis, while Paul Engler argues that it is also a “historic trigger event” that requires a cohesive “story, strategy, and structure,” committed to “democracy and a deep sense of collective empathy” as well as capable of countering austerity, the corporate agenda, and bail-outs for the wealthy at the

expense of everyone else. Lorah Steichen and Lindsay Koshgarian of the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. have also affirmed that “Racism and racial oppression form the foundation for both the extractive fossil fuel economy and the militarized economy. Neither could exist without the presumption that some human lives are worth less than others.” The U.S. response to COVID-19 has laid bare how much the U.S. has discounted the lives of Native Americans, people of color, brown and black immigrants, and the poor; and how urgently we need to “resist, rethink, and restructure” the global political economy, from one focused on competition, war, resource extraction, and the privatization of everything to one that prioritizes purpose over production, as well as cooperation, peace, and the health and well-being of the planet and all who inhabit it. Of necessity, that project must focus first on the United States, the world’s most aggressive and lethal power, and its Pentagon, the globe’s largest military market.⁷

One of the most significant roles progressive educators can play toward that just transition is to help people in our classrooms (and the larger public) to connect the dots between the interests of capitalism’s global elite, corporate lobbyists, and military contractors, and government spending, austerity programs, the militarization and surveillance of everyday life, increased wealth and income inequality, processes of racialization, and the climate crisis, to name but a few. At the same time, whether they show up on campus or via Zoom during the Fall of 2020, those making the transition from high school to college and university also represent our first cohort of entering students who have never known life absent endless wars, and whose K-12 experiences included some form of surveillance and the active-shooter drill. Born after September 11 and the beginning of the Afghanistan War in October 2001, mere toddlers when the United States invaded Iraq on manipulated intelligence derived from military briefings and private contractors during March 2003, and pre-teens during the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed it, these students know that their future life chances depend upon their abilities to sort out the multiple disasters that previous generations have bequeathed to them. And, as the two opening essays argue, the first by David Vine and the second by William Astore, this imperiled generation places upon educators an urgent obligation to prepare them to lead us to a more peaceful, humane, just, and equitable future.

Anthropologist David Vine, author of *Base Nation* (2015) and regular contributor to the “Costs of War Project” at Brown University’s Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, provides many of the tools we will need in the days ahead, and his powerful essay—“Unpacking the Invisible Military Backpack”—frames this entire issue. His work continues to remind us that the United States has spent the last 20 years at war, not only in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, and beyond, with more than 400,000 active-duty troop members stationed on over 800 bases in 70 countries. He also forcefully argues that we have “failed to teach about war

broadly enough, consistently enough, and with the sense of urgency demanded by the death, injury, and destruction that nearly two decades of continuous U.S. warfare have inflicted.” As a result, progressive educators far too often find themselves teaching to the already converted and ceding ground to those who emphasize a narrative of heroes and patriots rather than victims of war, and to those who bang the drum for the kinds of capitalist, military, and imperial expansion that ultimately undermine our democratic ideals, damage the environment, and make entire communities, at home and abroad (including U.S. territories) dependent on military contracts for their very survival. At the same time, government propaganda, limited media coverage, and educational curricula tend to keep wars hidden from view. As Vine notes, the U.S. government has also exacerbated that invisibility through the lack of a draft, as well as a refusal to raise revenue through taxation or war bonds to pay for its post-9/11 wars.

As Heidi Peltier’s research confirms, Congress has spent the last 20 years financing its military arsenal through borrowing. The cumulative interest on that credit-card debt, even if the U.S. “were to stop incurring any new war-related expenses” as of January 2020, has already soared from \$24.5 billion in 2001 to more than \$925 billion in 2019, and will reach more than \$2.14 trillion by 2030. None of this spending has secured peace; indeed, it has fueled more violence, destruction, racism, sexism, and poverty.⁸

Moreover, endless spending on war has had dire consequences for those living within the United States and its territories. With monopoly capitalists, systems integrators, and military-intelligence contractors exercising undue influence over both federal and state spending, the United States has created international chaos and a “Homeland Security Bubble” on the verge of collapse. With the Bush administration gutting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and increasing its military-surveillance-prison budget year-after-year, the world has watched in horror as the United States fails to protect people within its own borders, beginning with Hurricane Katrina and thereafter showing its inability to meet the challenges of the next in a series of climate disasters. As the ongoing deregulation of the financial services sector continued during the first decade of the 21st century, George W. Bush also called upon Americans to mortgage their futures on consumption as a patriotic duty. When combined with risky financial instruments, and billion-dollar markets opened up for small- and medium-sized “Homeland Security” providers in North America, Internet and other forms of consumption also created the context for a real-estate bubble that collapsed in 2006 and ushered in the Great Recession of 2008. To make U.S. war-making less visible as the Obama administration focused on restoring an economy teetering on the brink of another depression, drone strikes became more common even if spending on the military declined from a then-high of \$824 billion in 2008 to \$621 in 2016.⁹

Over the past twenty years, the response to every crisis, at both the federal as well as state and local levels, has consistently centered on funding for war, policing, and surveillance, tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy, and austerity

programs that have eviscerated budgets for public health, transportation, education, and other social-essential services. The Trump administration has merely made things much, much worse: “re-branding” the United States from a mythological nation of immigrants who welcome all-comers to a walled society intolerant of anyone other than those who are white, fomenting what Americans have described under right-wing dictatorships as “death squads” (white nationalists, the police, the military, second amendment revisionists, and others) to engage in an all-out war against black and brown people, and advancing a more rabid doctrine of private property rights at the expense of Americans, the undocumented, the global population, and other “barriers” to expansion as the country plunges more deeply into the authoritarian state Trump and his enablers fetish, no matter the cost. The 25 May 2020 public lynching of George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis Police Department is symptomatic of a much longer history, one we desperately need to unpack, not only for those who already understand that this nation needs structural change, but also for those who still refuse to come to terms with the United States’ catastrophic trajectory.

Drawing on his 20-year experience in studying, writing, and teaching about war, Vine provides a thoughtful and comprehensive list of suggestions about how we might more effectively engage people from a variety of backgrounds, respecting those we meet in the classroom where we find them, then gently guiding them through the mythology, misinformation, and mystification of the post-9/11 rationale for militarization, and on to alternative visions of the future. In addition to the many proposals and resources he offers, Vine suggests that we need to show how much wars have cost, and the trade-offs of war spending, including comparisons of military spending versus spending on universal free education and the eradication of student debt. He additionally cautions that we need to focus on the system rather than the soldier, making capitalism, settler-colonialism, Native Americans and indigenous communities, people of color, U.S. territories and overseas colonies and military bases, and the human toll of war and empire visible in ways that expose militarization as neither natural nor inevitable no matter the time period. Employing intersectionality more broadly also allows us to make displacement, racism, sexism, and hypermasculinity more visible, along with the militarization of policing in communities of color and poor neighborhoods, along the U.S.-Mexican border, and within white supremacist militia movements. At the same time, it offers the opportunity to connect these phenomena to dissent and anti-war, civil rights, and other social movements focused on “climate justice, universal health care, labor, racial justice, gender equality, and LGBTQI+ rights.” Doing so will have the added benefit of countering the historical amnesia and clouds of forgetfulness that have infused education in the United States.

Much of this work can be done, Vine suggests, by assigning research projects focused on investigating the long arm of institutions involved in the military-industrial-academic-prison-surveillance complex, and by turning

classrooms into “war clinics,” ones that take people out of the classroom to work with various groups, including but not limited to Code Pink, the Costs of War Project, the Institute for Policy Studies, veterans groups, and anti-recruitment/war/military base movements. We would also suggest that readers of *Radical Teacher* delve into Vine’s latest book—*The United States of War: A Global History of America’s Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* (University of California Press, 2020)—along with Daniel Immerwahr’s *How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the United States* (Vintage, 2020), both excellent primers about how the United States—along with the global capital markets, multinational corporations, and international organizations it has long dominated—has deepened the integration of an increasingly globalized military-industrial-intelligence complex.

All of this might seem like a heavy lift, but as we know from our own experiences on campus and beyond it, those who embrace capitalism as an article of faith do not necessarily know what it means or implies. Once defined and unpacked, however, capitalism’s profit motive, insatiable appetite for expansion, and internal contradictions make clearer the ways in which inhabitants of the United States, particularly since World War II, have slowly but surely acquiesced to the “privatization and militarization of everything,” to the belief that the nation’s imperial ambitions are for the greater good of humanity, that the benefits and conveniences of surveillance technologies developed for the military (the computer, the Internet, GPS tracking, drones, and so on) outweigh the costs; that is, until they learn about the provenance of the U.S. command economy, examine the numbers, and realize that they can never again unsee the bedeviling trade-offs they have unwittingly sanctioned: war-making for profit versus healthcare and education; resource extraction versus environmental protections; surveillance versus convenience; and the snare and delusion that technologies can solve our larger political, social, and economic problems versus actually tackling them through structural change. As sociologist Vincent Mosco observed after the dot.com bubble burst at the turn of the 21st century, “Myth is not a gloss on reality; it embodies its own reality. These views are especially difficult for people to swallow as the chorus grows for the view that we are entering a new age, a time so significant that it merits the conclusion that we have entered ‘the end of history.’” But he also asserted that such myths fail “to consider the potential for a profound contradiction between the idea of a liberal democracy and the growing control of the world’s political economy by the concentrated power of its largest businesses.”¹⁰ As the rest of the essays in this volume make clear, we may live in the present, but we carry our histories with us; and therefore need to confront those histories, make them more visible, if we hope to change course.

As a complement to Vine’s piece, William J. Astore shares his decades-long experiences as a retired lieutenant colonel, professor of history, academic administrator, author of books on Vietnam and the aerospace industry, and regular contributor to various publications, including TomDispatch.com, *CounterPunch*, and *Truthout*. His

“Militarism and Education in America” makes another vital pedagogical intervention. Astore emphasizes the need for critical thinking about and resistance to what he describes as the “soft militarism” of American society, including but hardly limited to the commodification of an education “infused with militarism,” and a popular culture of films, literature, and performative acts that celebrate war and spectacular feats of violence. He also unveils many of the other ways in which the military influences education, including the hiring of retired generals and admirals to run universities “even though they have no experience in education,” military fly-overs at football games and other militaristic displays and celebrations, ROTC recruiting at high schools and on college campuses, funding to universities that push them to become “feeders to the military-industrial complex and the wider intelligence community,” pension plans heavily invested in military expansion, and every other act that sells education as a commodity “for private gain rather than a process of learning for the public good.” Among the antidotes he recommends, Astore suggests anti-war comic/graphic books that can reach wider audiences, “impact maps” that show the military suppliers who have entered states in which campus communities live, research into the “revolving door” between senior military officers and major defense contractors, and collaborative projects with organizations such as Veterans for Peace and About Face: Veterans Against the War.

As the rest of the essays in this volume make clear, we may live in the present, but we carry our histories with us; and therefore need to confront those histories, make them more visible, if we hope to change course.

Astore notes the enormity of the task, including opposition within the academy given the financial incentives that drive administrators and some of our colleagues. Still, he claims that we must persist in teaching about militarism, no matter how “grim or controversial” the topic, to “free our students (and ourselves) from the chains forged by pervasive militarism, incessant materialism, and a culture suffused by violence and war.”¹¹

The first two essays place a wide-angle lens on the physical and psychological costs of war that reinforce the need to trace the military-industrial complex back to the colonial period, through the nation’s inception, and into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They additionally point to the need to revisit a long line of critiques that have focused on military Keynesianism and the increased levels of monopoly capital that the American military-industrial complex helped to create during World War II, then sustained throughout the Cold War and into the post-9/11 era. Before we return to the final three essays in the issue, all vital case studies grounded in particular pedagogies, courses, and places, we thought it might be useful to highlight how we might also incorporate one powerful

critique into our teaching because it emerges as a central theme in this issue, quickly allows students to connect the dots to their on-line activities, and helps to frame the important work that Philip Napoli, Mary Jo Klinker and Heidi Morrison, and J. Ashley Foster and Andrew Janco have recently undertaken in collaboration with students and community partners, along with the challenges that work has posed.

Beginning in 1966, with the pathbreaking work of Marxist economists Paul Alexander Baran and Paul Marlor Sweezy, critics of the military-industrial complex have, time and again, demonstrated that the American military establishment and the corporations that receive public funding to develop technological systems and markets for American expansion (including but in no way limited to Silicon Valley's cluster of private military contractors that also produce the many digital gadgets we can no longer seem to do without), not only strengthened the U.S.'s permanent war economy, but also successfully lobbied the government to socialize the risks and privatize the profits of what has expanded into a much larger military-industrial-academic-surveillance-prison complex over time, while simultaneously granting corporate capital undue influence over domestic and foreign policy.¹² Contesting, then dismantling the power they have accrued to themselves is an enormous task, and the damage they have done around the world cannot easily be undone, but by building on the work of Baran and Sweezy, sociologist John Bellamy Foster and legal scholar Robert W. McChesney have provided a chronology worth drawing upon as a teaching tool, as a way of defining and unpacking monopoly-finance capital and its connections to the military-industrial complex *as well as* the digital age.¹³

Coining the phrase "surveillance capitalism" during 2014, Foster and McChesney followed the trail of the permanent warfare state that was created in the wake of World War II, and that expanded into a surveillance state during the Internet era. The trail begins with none other than Dwight D. Eisenhower. Although he was a central architect of the United States' permanent war economy, when in 1946 he proposed the economic gains Americans could enjoy by placing corporations, scientists, industries, and academic research at the service of the American military, even he began to worry about what his administration had unleashed. By the time he gave his prophetic farewell address in 1961, Eisenhower thus cautioned "against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex." By 1964, he additionally admonished the American quest for absolute security as one that would "eventually end only in national bankruptcy," both economic and moral.¹⁴ Still, by the mid-1960s, U.S. military bases around the world numbered in excess of 1,000, where the American government and its far-flung network of military contractors, planned to make the world safe for American capitalist expansion.¹⁵

The efforts of the military-industrial complex were aided and abetted during the 1950s, Foster and McChesney argue, by two complementary forces: the "brand" makers on Madison Avenue, those advertising agencies that

transformed American consumer habits and made planned obsolescence the norm; and the government-funded corporations and research universities that developed computers and prototypes of the Internet, first for the military and then for mass consumption.¹⁶

By the 1970s, members of the military-industrial complex had also created a digital infrastructure capable of larger moves into surveillance, including the domestic surveillance of anti-war protestors, civil rights activists, and others. Thereafter, the deregulation of transportation, communications, and the financial services sector produced a "permanent financial-bubble-prone economy" on top of the permanent war economy, with increased levels of monopoly power the result. By 2014, Apple, Microsoft, and Google had emerged among America's most profitable government contractors and multinational corporations, internet monopolies capable of exercising enormous economic power over government spending and free to exploit the world's most vulnerable populations.

Research into these and other technology giants reveal that they "seeded" their moves into commercial products, first as subcontractors to the U.S.'s largest military contractors, and then as prime contractors for the Pentagon. As just one recent example reveals, during October of 2018, Jeff Bezos defended Amazon's decision to seek a \$10-billion Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure (JEDI) cloud computing services contract for the U.S. Department of Defense. "If big tech companies are going to turn their backs on the US Department of Defense, this country is going to be in trouble," Bezos declared, and "one of the jobs of a senior leadership team is to make the right decision even when unpopular" among employees or concerned members of the public. Bezos did not elaborate upon what he meant by "trouble" or "the right decision," but his message was clear: neither moral quandaries over particular kinds of military work nor privacy and other public concerns should stand in the way of shareholder value and the profits his firms stand to realize by contracting with the government on space-based, military, and big-data projects. As the founder, chairman, and chief executive officer of Amazon, founder of aerospace company Blue Origin, owner of *The Washington Post*, and wealthiest person in the world according to *Forbes'* 2018 rankings, Bezos, like his competitors at Microsoft, IBM, Oracle, and Google, understands that the future of the companies he controls and profits from are inextricably linked to the U.S. government (the largest military and intelligence market in the world) and a larger network of surveillance technologies used to exploit marginalized communities, whether in the Global South or closer to home.¹⁷

Knowing the bounty that awaits those who can tap the U.S. government market for surveillance work, as well as states willing to provide billions of dollars-worth of incentives for big-data firms to relocate their operations, Bezos had no qualms about Amazon receiving a \$600 million computing cloud-contract from the Central Intelligence Agency during 2014. As part of his systems integration strategy, Bezos also lobbied to win the \$500 million contract that Blue Origin received from the U.S. Air Force to develop rockets for

launching national security satellites. Anticipating Amazon's front-runner status among those competing for JEDI and other contracts, Bezos has continued to dismiss those who protest his company's policies, including its working conditions around the world and projects such as the ReKognition facial recognition technology that the multinational developed for police departments and government agencies. To win this and other contracts under Bezos's leadership, Amazon spent more than \$67 million on lobbying between 2000 and 2017, employing more than 100 lobbyists in Washington, D.C. alone (with 68 of them "revolvers," insiders who have moved from government to the private sector to smooth the way for future contracting opportunities).¹⁸

Bezos and his empire (along with others associated with big-data gathering and the military-industrial-intelligence complex) are ripe for a critical history, one refracted through the lens of surveillance studies and the powerful tools the field's practitioners have provided to other disciplines. Surveillance studies scholars continue to remind us that surveillance and big data reach into every aspect of society, and that those technologies are far from value-free. By creating, manipulating, and exploiting algorithms that sort us socially, make some lives and bodies more visible, and segment us into different markets, surveillance technologies make it easier to control the vulnerable, monitor our work and consumption habits, and target specific populations for policing. Increasingly, our on-line activities determine who gets and who pays, which class, race, or ethnic group can acquire an education, a job, housing, credit, and insurance (including health insurance), and the right to vote. The propaganda machine of on-line advertising and government control also determines who will receive justice (and who will not).¹⁹

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Far too few of those who enter our classrooms know this history, which helps to explain why people in the U.S. remain both ideologically confused as well as wedded to Margaret Thatcher's TINA ("there is no alternative" to capitalism) and an uncritical faith in technology's promise. Cathy O'Neill's *Weapons of Math Destruction* is a particularly powerful primer for classroom teaching, for it unpacks both the simple and complex ways that technologies serve capital as we continue to leave digital trails through our phones, computers, GPS trackers, and other platforms. Her accessible chapters also provide powerful examples, in different settings, about how much surveillance and big data increase inequality and threaten democracy.²⁰ The ongoing manipulation of and confusion about what guides U.S.

society and those it reaches also make the experiences drawn from the final three essays here both vital and urgent.

Historian Philip F. Napoli, the director of the Veterans Oral History Project and author of *Bringing it All Back Home*, has spent most of his career on public and oral history projects that can shine a bright light on many of the issues that confront us, in ways that not only stimulate deep listening but also involve larger communities in much-needed dialogues.²¹ In "The Radicalization of Oral History," which he co-authored with four of his former students, two of them military veterans of America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Napoli walks us through both the transformative power as well as the limitations of oral history. Following interviews conducted with war veterans, from World War II and the Vietnam era, Napoli's four co-authors shared their experiences with him. Napoli then contextualized what those experiences meant in terms of the students' intellectual trajectories, career paths, and personal odysseys. The narratives highlight the importance of listening, not only to what veterans reveal about their experiences, but also how people from vastly different backgrounds receive what they hear. Napoli's oral history projects have been particularly meaningful for the veterans who have participated, but we know that you will find all four co-author reflections as fascinating as we did. We have much to learn from Napoli's ethical approach to oral history as well. Indeed, he provides a road map for making our work more public and accessible without violating the trust of those we might interview and work with in a variety of contexts.

In the fourth essay, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies scholar Mary Jo Klinker, and Heidi Morrison, a social and cultural historian of the Modern Middle East and author of *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt*, take us outside the United States, to recount the experiences they shared with a group of study-abroad undergraduates in the Palestinian territories.²² In their "On the Pedagogy of 'Boomerangs'," Klinker and Morrison explore the ways in which looking at occupations elsewhere allows us to see occupations everywhere around us. They also reveal the value in taking students (and ourselves), quite literally, outside our comfort zones, so we can gain a deeper understanding of the co-implications of occupations. Their encounters, particularly at armed border crossings, also remind us that study-abroad experiences have much to teach us about the toll that international agreements (including "free-trade" ones) have had on vulnerable populations, and the ways in which scholar-activists need to adapt to what our students teach us as they discover the costs of war on the ground, including the brutal treatment indigenous people endure at the hands of private security forces hired by state actors. Additionally, as their title suggests, their work has "Boomerang" effects, allowing those with whom they have worked to see (and want to explore even further) the relationships between the settler-colonial states of Israel and the U.S., the very foundations on which rest violent dispossessions. These encounters also expose the fact that war and empire are not recent phenomena that sully otherwise democratic impulses. They are woven into the very origins of such nation-states.

Finally, J. Ashley Foster and Andrew Janco, both involved in pushing the boundaries of digital humanities and human rights scholarship, turned our call for submissions on its head, to remind readers of *Radical Teacher* that we have also failed to teach about peace.²³ Their “Challenging a ‘Warist’ Society with Digital Peace Pedagogy” asks us to take seriously the ways in which a “warist” society “privileges a discourse of war over a discourse of peace.” That same society tends to erase feminist theory and the women who have played a central role in peace discourses. Reflecting on their students’ engagement in an oral history and partner-collaboration project with the American Friends Service Committee, Foster and Janco share what they have learned from student engagement with building peace, through cooperation and collaboration, listening and reflecting, and respecting diverse stories and experience. As we reflect on teaching our students about capitalism, war, and empire in a time of COVID-19, the Foster-Janco piece offers a model of how we might build on Vine’s “war-clinic” model to create “peace-clinic” classrooms. Their work also provides an important window into how we might re-imagine a society that can prioritize peace over war, economic cooperation and security over competition, and a shared vision for serving the collective rather than the individual.

We are deeply grateful to the authors in this issue who have shared their experiences and expertise. Together, their contributions inspire us and give us hope, as do the governments and societies that have handled the coronavirus differently from the United States. Fifty-five years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. declared, “I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence.”²⁴ If ever there was a time to act boldly on that vision, that too is now. Paul Engler recently suggested that “the Bernie Sanders campaign could pivot to become a movement focused on a pandemic response” to advance justice and democracy. Perhaps all activists can honor King and the work of 1968 by joining hands with the many groups identified by the authors in this issue, including Vine’s suggestion that we widen our network to include those involved in Black Lives Matter, the Poor People’s Campaign, Racial Justice Has No Borders, Common Dreams, and other groups that promise to help us move from a warfare economy to a moral one, from societies at increasing risk to ones that embrace the wisdom of indigenous communities and civil rights activists. We would do well to remember that we have also failed to teach truth and reconciliation movements, in South Africa and elsewhere, where we can learn valuable lessons about how better to prepare for a world beyond capitalism, war, and empire.²⁵

Notes

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2. See, for example, Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Domination* (Cornell University Press, 1992); Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: the United States Since the 1930s* (Yale University Press, 1997); Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (Anchor Books), 2003; Christian Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America, from Slavery to the War on Terror* (Basic Books, 2003); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Picador, 2008); Joan Johnson Freese, *Heavenly Ambitions: America’s Quest to Dominate Space* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Michael A. Bernstein and Mark R. Wilson, eds., “New Perspectives on the Military-Industrial Complex,” *Enterprise and Society* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1-9; and Jocelyn Wills, *Tug of War: Surveillance Capitalism, Military Contracting, and the Rise of the Security State* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017).
3. On Boeing, Loughheed Martin, and other Pentagon contractors seeking bailouts in the midst of the pandemic, see Mandy Smithberger, “Bailing Out the War State: Hasn’t the Military-Industrial Complex Taken Enough of Our Money?” *Project on Government Oversight*, 04 May 2020, at <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/2020/05/beware-the-pentagons-pandemic-profiteers>; and William Hartung and Mandy Smithberger, “America’s Defense Budget is Bigger than You Think,” *The Nation*, 07 May 2019. In addition, see Rebecca Thorpe, *The American Warfare State: The Domestic Politics of Military Spending* (University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Wills, *Tug of War*, 1-29 and 301-33.
4. Laura Steichen, “First in Military Spending, Last in Our COVID-19 Response,” 08 May 2020. In addition, see William Hurtung, “Five Reasons to Cut Pentagon Spending in the Era of COVID-19,” *Forbes*, 16 April 2020; Joan Roelofs, “Military Keynesianism Marches On,” *CounterPunch*, 03 October 2019, at <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/10/03/military-keynesianism-marches-on/>; Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (Metropolitan Books, 2008), and “One Down, Who Knows How Many to Go?,” 08 January 2019, at www.TomDispatch.com; and Tom Engelhardt, *A Nation Unmade by War* (Haymarket Books, 2018).
5. Eugene Jarecki, “Trump’s Covid-19 Inaction Killed Americans: Here’s a Counter That Shows How Many,” *Washington Post*, 6 May 2020; and <https://trumpdeathclock.com/>.
6. See <https://spacesecurityindex.org>.
7. Richard D. Wolff, “Coronavirus: a Capitalist Crisis,” *Dollars and Sense*, March/April 2020, at <http://dollarsandsense.org/archives/2020/0320wolff.html>;

and Paul Engler, "Coronavirus is a Historic Trigger Event—and It Needs a Movement to Respond," 16 March 2020, at <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2020/03/coronavirus-historic-trigger-event-needs-movement-response/>.

In addition, see Laura Steichen and Lindsay Koshgarian, *No Warming, No War: How Militarism Fuels the Climate Crisis -- and Vice Versa*, National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies, April 2020, at <https://www.pisdc.org/climate-militarism-primer/>.

8. Heidi Peltier, "The Cost of Debt-Financed War: Public Debt and Rising Interest for Post-9/11 War Spending," *20 Years of War: A Cost of War Research Series*, January 2020, at

<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/Peltier%202020%20-%20The%20Cost%20of%20Debt-financed%20War.pdf>; and Laura Steichen, 08 May 2020, as well as "Trade Offs: Your Money, Your Choices," National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies at <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/>. The National Priorities Project, "Fighting for a U.S. Federal Budget that Prioritizes Peace, Economic Security and Share Prosperity," website contains excellent news and analyses of the federal budget, examples of what spending could have purchased instead with the trillions spent on the military, as well as counters that show, in real time, the costs of war since 2001, military and security spending over time, and other tools for analyzing the federal budget.

9. David Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (Metropolitan Books, 2015), and *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* (University of California Press, 2020). You can read more about his work at <https://www.davidvine.net/>. In addition, see Joan Roelofs, "Military Keynesianism Marches On," *CounterPunch*, 03 October 2019, at <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/10/03/military-keynesianism-marches-on/>; Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (Metropolitan Books, 2008), and "One Down, Who Knows How Many to Go?," 08 January 2019, at www.TomDispatch.com; Tom Engelhardt, *A Nation Unmade by War* (Haymarket Books, 2018); and Daniel Immerwahr, "How the US has Hidden Its Empire," *The Guardian*, 15 February 2019.

10. Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (MIT Press, 2004). In addition, see Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (Public Affairs Books, 2011); and Wills, *Tug of War*, 9-14.

11. As just one example of his writing on the theme, see Astore's "Killing Me Softly with Militarism: The Decay of Democracy in America," 24 October 2019, at www.TomDispatch.com. For a fuller listing of his writing and work, visit Astore's website, "Bracing Views: Making Sense of a Vexing and Perplexing World," at <https://bracingviews.com/>.

12. Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (Monthly Review Press, 1966).

13. John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, "Surveillance Capitalism: Monopoly-Finance Capital, the Military-Industrial Complex, and the Digital Age," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*, 01 July 2014, at <https://monthlyreview.org/2014/07/01/surveillance-capitalism/>.

14. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Address to the Nation," 01 January 1961, at <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/>, and "Speech," Columbus, OH, 15 October 1964, Box 6, Folder "Speeches Made by DDE," Dwight D. Eisenhower Archives, at <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov>.

15. In addition to Foster and McChesney, as well as others cited above, there are many short pieces that progressive educators can employ as primers that allow students to see the costs of the military-industrial complex through the numbers in stories selected from mainstream as well as alternative media. See, for example, Heidei Garrett-Peltier, "Is Military-Keynesianism the Solution?: Why War is Not a Sustainable Strategy for Economic Recovery," *Dollars and Sense*, March/April 2010; Margaret Talev and Bloomberg, "Trump Cancels U.S. Report on Civilian Strikes in Drone Strikes," *Forbes*, 6 March 19; Sarah Almkhtar and Rod Norland, "What Did the U.S. Get for \$2 Trillion in Afghanistan?," *New York Times*, 09 December 2019. And, despite the secrecy of the military and its private contractors, we also recommend pulling material from government websites, including the Department of Defense, at <https://www.defense.gov>; and trade journals, such as *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, affectionately dubbed by industry insiders as "Death from the Air."

16. Although not as widely read as his other works, Thomas Frank's *Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago Press, 1998) is one of the first serious critiques of advertising and the role that industry played in making consumption "cool" and ubiquitous through branding after World War II. Among the many things U.S. elites feared, he forcefully argues, was a return to Depression-era frugality. Although they targeted youth culture, the marketing industry ultimately aimed its efforts at middle-class adults, particularly white "company men" (and their spouses), those with good union jobs, war veterans, and the upwardly mobile status seekers (those later hailed as the "Greatest Generation," another euphemism for the "Greatest Nation on Earth"). Many of these people also worked for the expanding military-industrial complex, even if they employed willful ignorance to justify their roles in the expansion of U.S. militarization and militarism.

17. Frank Konkel, "Microsoft, Amazon CEOs Stand by Defense Work After Google Bails on JEDI," *NextGov*, 15 October 2018, <https://www.nextgov.com>; Olivia Rudgard, "Tech Companies Need to Work with US Military, Says Amazon Boss Jeff Bezos," *The Telegraph*, 15 October 2018; Naomi Nix, "Google Drops Out of Pentagon's \$10-Billion Cloud Computing Competition," *Bloomberg*, 8 October 2018,

<https://www.bloomberg.com>; Aaron Gregg and Christian Davenport, "Meet the Man at the Center of the High-Stakes, Winner-Take-All \$10 Billion Pentagon Cloud Contract," *Washington Post*, 2 October 2018; Ron Miller, "What Each Cloud Company Could Bring to the Pentagon's \$10B JEDI Cloud Contract," *TechCrunch*, 29 September 2018, <https://www.techcrunch.com>; and Luisa Kroll and Kerry Dolan, eds., *Forbes Billionaires 2018: Meet the Richest People on the Planet*, *Forbes*, 6 March 2018.

18. See, for example, May Jeong, "Everybody Immediately Knew It Was for Amazon': Has Bezos Become More Powerful in D.C. Than Trump?," *Vanity Fair*, 13 August 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com>; and Frank Konkel, "The Details About the CIA's Deal with Amazon," *The Atlantic*, 17 July 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com>.

19. For more information, scholarship, and resources, visit <https://www.surveillance-studies.net/>.

20. Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (Broadway Books, 2016).

21. Philip F. Napoli, *Bringing It All Back Home: An Oral History of New York City's Vietnam Veterans* (Hill and Wang, 2013). In addition, see Napoli, Thomas Brinson, Neil Kenny, and Joan Furey, "Oral History, Moral Injury, and Vietnam Veterans," *The Oral History Review*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2019), 71-103; and <http://philipnapoli.com/>.

22. In addition to *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt* (Palgrave 2015), Morrison is the compiler and editor of *The Global History of Childhood Reader* (Routledge, 2012) and co-general editor of the forthcoming, six-volume, *A Cultural History of Youth* (Bloomsbury, 2020). For more information, see <https://www.winona.edu/women-studies/mary-jo-klinker.asp>; and <https://www.uwlax.edu/profile/hmorrison/>.

23. For more on their research and work, see <http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/english/faculty/foster.html>; and <https://www.haverford.edu/users/ajanco>.

24. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Sermon at Temple Israel of Hollywood," 26 February 1965; and Engler, op.cit. In addition, see Mutaza Hussain, "America and the New Geopolitics after Coronavirus," *The Intercept*, 12 April 2020.

25. See, for example, <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/>; <https://ggjalliance.org/actions-campaigns/racial-justice-has-no-borders/>; <https://www.commondreams.org/>; <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>; <https://www.standingrock.org/>; <http://www.worldbeyondwar.org>; <https://www.ictj.org/>; and <https://www.selmacenterfornonviolence.org/>.



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