

Moore, Ellen. *Grateful Nation: Student Veterans and the Rise of the Military Friendly Campus*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. Xiii + 199 pages. Paperback, 25.95

Grateful Nation is the published dissertation of Ellen Moore, who conducted the study of veteran scholars on America's campuses of higher learning during a period described by noted historian Andrew Bacevich as an "era of permanent, preemptive war" (p. 1). Moore approached the issue as a societal research project which included interviews of veterans and educators on several campuses. Due to the nature of the survey, the interviewees are identified by pseudonyms and the college campuses are also hidden in general names and descriptions.

Moore identifies three observations often found in literature on "war veterans": military enlistees are unprepared for college, veterans face enduring symptoms of trauma, and some campuses are unfriendly to the U.S. military. Using these observations, she "examines what happens when soldiers return home and enter college...and the ways that combat related physical and emotional trauma affect students' lives" (p. 13). Some of the key questions that underlay her work are: "How do civilians learn to become soldiers? What happens when soldiers leave the military, return to civilian life, and enroll in college as students" (p. 13).

Interestingly, Moore's first area of discussion was basic training—those first weeks where the military takes a group of young men and women, often fresh from high school, and transforms them into soldiers.¹ Basic training is painted as a process where civilian cultural habits and norms are replaced through domination and subordination. Moore later argues that the legacies of these practices are contested: some contend that the discipline of basic training and other follow-on military activities were a positive attribute to some veteran students' success; others, however, maintained that "being trained not to think" (p.47) contributed to their failure as students. In one example, Moore explains

Oscar saw college as a mission to be accomplished. He likened his college classes to combat: “[College] is a constant struggle. Like when you’re attacking the hill, you want to attack the hill going up, not backing down...I am a very determined person. I think that’s what I got from the Marines” (p. 47).

This is in contrast to another veteran that was interviewed as she entered college for the second time. Evie enlisted in the Army as a medic and deployed to Iraq. She stated that “it was difficult to learn when she couldn’t perceive a practical application for her coursework” (p. 57). Her military training directly related to her military job and what she would do on the battlefield in Iraq. Evie proclaimed

When you’re here in community college and you’re learning about anthropology...its harder to show that translates to real life, so I think that is why some [veterans] have a hard time taking it seriously (p. 57).

Moore also discusses the valorization of military service, a phenomenon that is not new to society but one that she argues affects the student veteran. The simplest expression of “thank you for your service” to the multitude of veteran programs has resulted in some veterans assuming a superior role over their civilian counterparts. It is generally accepted that there is a divide between those that have served in the military and those who have not served. Moore argues that the ideology of military superiority actually results in a cleavage between veterans and their classmates.

There is a plethora of literature written by and about returning soldiers from the current wars—most relay their experiences while deployed and their transformation back to living in Any Town, USA; however, their discussion about returning to school is usually a small side story to their larger story.

Many of the veterans interviewed by Moore cited their limited opportunities after high school graduation and the educational benefits offered by the military as a major inducement to enlist. A Pew Survey quoted by Rosa Brooks in 2013 stated that 77 percent of post-9/11 recruits

cited educational benefits as an “important reason for joining.”² However, in 2017 Jon Marcus wrote, “The odds of a GI Bill recipient graduating from San Diego Mesa College...are one in 100.”³ This issue however must be looked at through different perspectives, many of which were not part of Moore’s study, such as career goals, family background and, most importantly, the veteran’s motives for achieving a college degree.

Moore provides anonymity for the colleges highlighted in the study. Reading the description of the schools allows the reader to make assumptions about the area of the country where the schools are located, but it is concerning that the small sample of schools may skew the results compared to a wider sample of both coasts and middle America.

I found the study an interesting read, well written, and based on individual interviews that follow scholarly norms. As a veteran that earned both a bachelor’s and master’s degree on two GI Bills, I found the study relevant and timely. A clear difference in my experience was that the support network available in the late 1970s and early 1980s was very different to the campus that Moore described (as I learned, first-hand, when I returned to graduate school in 2011). As Moore explains, many campuses offer veteran centers, clubs, and counseling services to assist the veteran-student in their education and adaptation to campus life.

Grateful Nation is an important book to be read by veteran advocates, educators, and those that establish policy for veteran education programs.

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¹ The term soldier is used throughout the book to describe any member of the armed forces rather than attempting to use the service specific titles; soldier, sailor, marine, airman, and guardsman.

² Brooks, Rosa. “By Other Means: Uncle Sam Wants Who?” *Foreign Policy*. July 31, 2013.

³ Jon Marcus, “Community Colleges Rarely Graduate the Veterans they Recruit,” *The Atlantic*, April 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/why-is-the-student-veteran-graduation-rate-so-low/523779/>.