

TEACHING RESOURCES:
Reading Questions and Classroom Activities

For Jennifer Greenburg's
*At War with Women: Military Humanitarianism and Imperial
Feminism in an Era of Permanent War*
(Cornell University Press, 2023)

At War with Women is available as a freely available [Open Access e-book](#) and in print (**30% discount** at [CUP online](#) with **09BCARD** at checkout)

This teaching guide is available for free download at jennygreenburg.com

Here are some guiding questions that can be used to facilitate small group discussion and/or given to students in advance as reading questions. Some small group activity suggestions follow.

If you are using *At War with Women* to teach, I would love to know about it and am happy to zoom into class and/or supply short teaching videos. Thanks for your engagement!

General Resources on Teaching About US Wars and Militarism

The [Costs of War Project](#), where many of my figures on the expense and expanse of the post-9/11 come from, provides extensive [teaching resources](#) freely available for course adoption. These are especially valuable to introduce students to the post-9/11 wars and facilitate discussion of the economic, human, environmental, political, and socio-cultural costs of war.

David Vine's article, [Unpacking the Invisible Military Backpack: 56 Suggestions for Teaching About War](#), also provides a number of useful suggestions.

Discussion Questions for *At War with Women*, by chapter

Introduction

- 1) What does Greenburg mean by a “new imperial feminism”? How does she define the component parts of “imperialism” and “feminism” and how do you see them coming together in a “new imperial feminism”?
- 2) Greenburg is in conversation with political economist Giovanni Arrighi's concept of *US hegemony*. How is *hegemony* different from what Greenburg refers to as “classic theories of *imperialism*”? What are the uses and limitations of this concept in analyzing post-9/11 geographies of violence?
- 3) The methods section describes a conjunctural method of analysis. What does this mean? How is it different from some of the other methods that have been used to study the post-9/11 wars?

Chapter One: Doctrinal Turning Points in the New Imperial Wars

- 1) This chapter identifies a number of changes in military doctrine in the post-9/11 period. Where (institutionally, financially, discursively) were these changes located and what are some of their key characteristics?
- 2) Changes in military doctrine depended on how the military read and understood colonial and Cold War histories of insurgency and counterinsurgency. What is one example in this chapter of how these histories were used in a way that shaped the post-9/11 wars? How might these examples inform public debate over how histories of race and empire are taught in K-12 and higher ed?
- 3) What does Greenburg mean by the “constriction of development” through doctrinal, financial, and institutional changes explored in this chapter? How is this reflected in the

transformation of key development institutions such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID)?

Chapter Two: The “Social Work” of War: Techniques and Struggles to Remake Military Labor

- 1) Private contractors play a significant role in this chapter. Unpack some of the cultural, historical, and political-economic forces that came together to put these for-profit development contractors on military bases.
- 2) Sean is one of the only marines we meet in this book who enlisted because they wanted to do civilian-focused tasks (“civil affairs”). What do we learn from his experience about ideas of masculinity in the military settings explored here?
- 3) Greenburg makes a claim for the need to move beyond binaries (the military’s own making and reflected in some academic work) between “violent” and “non-violent.” Instead she argues for a more comprehensive definition of violence to understand mundane technologies such as PowerPoint as part of a *spectrum of military violence*. This requires us to look at the stories the military tells about itself to its own labor force—a different approach from more prevalent engagements with the stories the military tells to the public at large. Do you find this idea of a *spectrum of military violence* compelling? Why or why not?

Chapter Three: Colonial “Lessons Learned”: The Contemporary Soldier Becomes the Historical Colonizer

- 1) Military instruction for the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars actively used colonial histories and figures. Why is this important? What, materially, does it mean for contemporary soldiers to model themselves after historical colonizers?
- 2) On page 106, the instructors talk about how “We’re here to teach you to go anywhere in the world, for any type of mission; you could be in Haiti, in Panama, anywhere in the freakin’ world.” This phrase, “anywhere in the world,” which reappears several times, makes a claim not only about *history* but also *geography*. What is the *geography* of “anywhere in the freakin’ world” and why is it important?
- 3) Choose a historical case explored in this chapter (e.g. Haiti, Vietnam, Algeria, etc.). What does Greenburg mean by the abstraction of colonial history? How do you see this concept of abstraction at work in the way this history comes into the present in your case?

Chapter Four: Soothing Occupation: Gender and the Strategic Deployment of Emotional Labor

- 1) What is “emotional labor”? Referencing Arlie Hochschild, how would you define this concept and how does it take on new valence in the context of the post-9/11 wars?
- 2) The women we meet in this chapter such as Edith, Beth, and Rochelle are both perpetrators of military violence and victims of abuse and mistreatment within the military. How is your understanding of military violence transformed by holding both of these dimensions? What was your emotional reaction to reading these testimonies? How does that reaction influence the way you think about military violence?

- 3) How are the assumptions Rochelle carries with her to Afghanistan challenged by what she actually experiences when she goes out on missions to Afghan villages? In these moments, what do we learn about the role of culture, religion, and history in the modern assembly of imperialism?

Chapter Five: A New Imperial Feminism: Color-Blind Racism and the Special Operation of Women's Rights

- 1) Amelia talks about how she played a particular role on the special operations mission not only in relation to Afghan civilians but also in relation to her fellow male soldiers. Relatedly, Cindy speaks of women possessing an "innate" emotional expertise (see especially pages 174-177). What are the normative gender expectations being produced in these moments?
- 2) What role does emotion play in the special forces missions detailed here? What does Greenburg mean by "the emotional experts of war" in terms of the labor this actually entailed and its consequences in terms of military violence?
- 3) Greenburg is in dialogue with Melani McAlister's understanding of "military multiculturalism" in the Gulf War (1990-1991). How is the color-blind military racism Greenburg describes different from previous iterations such as McAlister's military multiculturalism? Why is it important to make these distinctions between different manifestations of racism?

Conclusion

- 1) In August 2021, the United States officially withdrew from Afghanistan in the chaotic Kabul airlift described here. The book concludes with the importance of understanding this moment through the continuities ushering the post-9/11 wars into their third decade. What are some of the key dimensions of continuity if we are to understand the post-9/11 wars not as over but as expanded in new forms?
- 2) What are some ways you personally experience these defining features of the post-9/11 wars in aspects of your life such as immigration or travel restrictions, government spending, racism, Islamophobia, climate change, etc.?
- 3) How might the gender politics explored here inform debates surrounding military transgender inclusion? Or political discourse around transgender politics and inclusion in society more broadly?

Small Group Activities

- 1) Colonial figures such as T.E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”) play a prominent role in military texts such as the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* and the lessons military instructors give. In Chapter 1 we meet military theorists who borrowed Lawrence’s terminology to title their own writings directed at US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan (Kilcullen and Nagl, see p.44), while soldiers in Chapter 2 are instructed to see the world through Lawrence’s colonial vision (see p.66). Discuss the work colonial histories do to make present-day war on pages 44 and 66, as well as other examples you noted while reading. Include in your discussion how these uses of history influence the meanings modern-day soldiers attach to race, gender, and culture in military encounters.
- 2) On page 87, we get a sense of how the development contractors working on military bases were well aware of the limitations they faced getting the military to adopt development as a weapon of war. At the same time, we see structural changes in Chapter 1 that have institutionally integrated development and defense in the post-9/11 era. The notion of development as a counterterrorism device persists in very recent State Department and USAID documents (e.g. citations here from 2021). If anyone in your group has worked in the international development sector (or read about it or spoken with friends and family who work in these sectors), discuss whether you have noticed a “creep” of the military into development work and what the effects of this have been.
- 3) On page 175, Cindy talks about how, unlike her male colleagues, she was able to modulate her voice and strategically use her “emotional expertise” to extract valuable information. Look at Figure 1 on page 27 and Figure 9 on page 142. Discuss the undercurrents of violence, power, and care you see at work in these images. How do these images reflect the ways in which gender is produced through the forms of military violence women such as Cindy are implicated in? Are there other images you have seen in the news or interviews you have heard in which you also note these forces of gender and violence?
- 4) We meet many characters in this book who struggle with how they are defined by and themselves define racial and gendered forms of social difference. This includes military masculinity, military femininity, emotional labor, color-blind racism, cultural racism, etc. Discuss some of the most striking ways you see these forms of race and gender lived in the world around you. What are some of the differences and similarities between how they are experienced here in military settings and the examples you have come up with?