SHOOTING STARS: MILITARIZATION AND CELEBRITY

by

Rebecca A. Forrest
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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of
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Committee:

___________________________________________  Director

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________  Program Director

___________________________________________  Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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Shooting Stars: Militarization and Celebrity

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

By

Rebecca A. Forrest
Master of Arts
George Mason University, 2006

Director: Char R. Miller
Department of Cultural Studies

Fall Semester 2017
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
Dedication

In Memory of:
Sergeant Lavola Helen Ellerbrock Babich USMC
Master Sergeant Edward Rudolph Babich USA
Private First Class William Bozo USA
Major Howard Alan Watt USMC

In Honor of:
Colonel William Arthur Bozo USA (Ret.)
Colonel Lin B. Zulick USA (Ret.)
Acknowledgements

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Abstract

SHOOTING STARS: MILITARIZATION AND CELEBRITY

Rebecca A. Forrest, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2017

Dissertation Director: Dr. Char R. Miller

Shooting Stars: Militarization & Celebrity

To explore the relationship between militarization and celebrity and how celebrities have been militarized in 20th century America, this dissertation examines the militarization of Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley. It discusses the often overlooked saturation of military themes in popular culture through an examination of these celebrities during and after their active duty military service. Celebrity, by romanticizing and aestheticizing the violence of war and military conflict, is one of the spaces that is colonized through militarization to maintain the military’s public support for its violent ends. Through the reading of cultural material including media coverage, images, films, songs, costumes, quotes, and commodities related to the celebrities discussed and their military service, this dissertation argues that the militarization of celebrity masks the horrors of war.
Chapter 1- Introduction

“We sleep peacefully in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.” – attributed to George Orwell

“If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie.”
— Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

1.1 Argument & Purpose of the Study

This dissertation argues that the militarization of celebrities masks the horrors of war, making war palatable. The militarization of celebrities masks the horrors of war by utilizing a thin veil whereby the celebrity identity is front & center, his/her military service is presented in ways that are similar to the way their celebrity has been widely communicated, and the horrors of war are obscured through words and images representing the celebrity’s service. These words and images also contribute to romanticizing and aestheticizing military service overall. By romanticizing and aestheticizing military service through images and media coverage, the militarization of celebrity also masks America’s violent role as a world power.
In order to illuminate this phenomenon, the case studies in this dissertation look at three celebrities who served in active duty—Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley—and discusses the different ways that the militarization of each masks the horrors of war. The militarization of certain celebrities has been briefly discussed in biographies and by scholars like Cynthia Enloe, but has not been analyzed in a sustained academic pursuit. This work remedies that and traces the militarization of celebrity in the cases of Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley, focusing on how each man was militarized differently and how each man’s military service contributed to the masking of the horrors of war. The conclusion of this dissertation also offers a brief discussion of the changes in the ways that celebrity has been militarized since the end of conscription in America.

1.2 Research Questions
My research is concerned with four central questions:

R1: How did the celebrity’s identity affect the way military service was perceived?

R2: How was the militarization of the celebrity presented to the American public?

R3: How was the reality of military service presented in different and distinct ways through Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley?
R4: What is the larger role that these celebrities have played and, to some extent, still play in how the military and military service is presented to and viewed by the American public?

1.3 Methodology
This dissertation specifically reads cultural material, including media coverage, images, films, songs, quotes, and commodities related to Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley and their militarization as text to investigate how the militarization of celebrity has been communicated and commodified. This cultural material is important because these publicly released items trace the construction and transformation of a celebrity’s identity, his militarization, and the impact of that militarization. This dissertation employs textual analysis because “texts are sensitive barometers of social processes, movement and diversity, and textual analysis can provide particularly good indicators of social change.”¹ A textual analysis of cultural material is important in this research because “it is increasingly through texts (visual texts included) that social control and social domination are exercised.”²

1.4 The Military & War
As an institute of the state, the military’s purpose is to stand at the ready to inflict violence and destruction and, if needed, go to war. Elaine Scarry aptly puts it, “[t]he main purpose and outcome of war, [action carried out by the military on behalf of the

¹ [http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1169&context=clcweb](http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1169&context=clcweb)
Kovala pg. 4
² Kovala pg. 5
state,] is injuring, though this fact is too self-evident and massive ever to be directly contested…it can…disappear from view along many separate paths.”

Destruction, injury, and death are the end goals of war and war is the reason that nations have standing armies.

S. J. Green, Christopher Dandeker, Tomas Kucera, Jürgen Kuhlman, and Jean Callaghan have associated the image of Janus, the Roman two-faced god of beginnings and endings, with the military and its relationship with civil society. The military is a “Janus-faced” organization. “On the one hand, [it has] to respond to the changing strategic context by building militarily effective organizations and, on the other, [it has] to establish an organization that is responsive to wider social values and thus to the society that pays for the armed services and without whose support they can do little.”

For the state and the military to gain support for war in a civil society, the horrors of war must be mediated.

According to Mary A. Favret, “[w]artime [during WWI and WWII]…was the effect of war mediated, brought home through a variety of instruments.” Favret’s work focuses on literature as an instrument to mediate war. Scarry refers to the mediation of the horrors of war by saying, “[i]t may disappear from view simply by being omitted: one

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3 Scarry pg. 63
4 “The basic function of the temple of Janus as the indicator of war and peace is not in dispute, since it is explained in a variety of ancient sources. When the temple doors are open, it indicates that Rome is at war; when closed, that Rome is at peace.” Green pg. 302
5 Dandeker pg. 639, Kuhlman & Callaghan pg. 6, and Kucera pg. 2
6 Favret pg. 11
can read many pages of a historic or strategic account of a particular military campaign, or listen to many successive installments in a newscast narrative of events in a contemporary war, without encountering the acknowledgement that the purpose of the event described is to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue[.]. This dissertation furthers Favet and Scarry’s works by focusing on how the militarization of celebrity mediates the horrors of war by presenting only part of the reality of military service and using the glamorized veil of celebrity to create a narrative that denies the horrors of war.

For the purpose of this dissertation, militarization, as a process, is defined as the inhabitation of and colonization of unexpected and non-traditional spaces by military imagery and values, including, but not limited to, images and values attached to war. Additionally, militarization gains its power from its known, but comfortably overlooked, presence in non-traditional spaces, like celebrity, and occupies a visible/invisible space in American culture due to the saturation of military influence and military themes in popular culture.

According to Joanna Bourke:

[We] are a warring people. Military practices, technologies and symbols have invaded our everyday lives. We rarely even notice it. We enthusiastically commemorate wars. We engage in current ones. Our garrisons are maintained
throughout the world and yet the military campaigns we wage abroad seem as real to most of us as the metaphorical wars on drugs or obesity.\textsuperscript{8}

Bourke is correct: militarization permeates culture. It is through the militarization of culture that “war is always on our minds,” either in support of or against war, and that “no one in the world today is untouched by militarism.”\textsuperscript{9} The militarization of celebrity masking the horrors of war adds to society’s ability to glorify war and to always have war ‘on our minds’ without our minds being completely consumed by its terrifying realities.

During the time periods discussed in this dissertation, WWII through the late 1950s, the military was viewed “as the institution through which citizens - at least male citizens – discharged their basic civic obligation.”\textsuperscript{10} Not all men, and women later during WWII, who served did so in roles that led them to take direct action in war and the horrors of war. However, after WWI, and again after WWII, this civic obligation, which was fulfilled by many men through conscription, included the understanding that war and participation in the horrors of war were potential realities. Additionally, even service members who served in roles stateside during WWII filled roles and completed tasks that were in support of war and, by extension, contributed to the horrors of war.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{8} Bourke pg. 3
\textsuperscript{9} Gusterson pg. 156
\textsuperscript{10} Moskos pg. 83
\textsuperscript{11} For example, my grandmother, SGT Lavola Helen Ellerbrock who served as a communications officer for the Marine Corps’ Women Reserves in Santa Barbara, CA. Though her service did not directly involve war and the horrors of war, the purpose of her service was to support the war and those directly involved in the horrors of war.
1.5 Celebrity

The discussion of celebrity in this dissertation necessitates the use of Weber’s definition of charisma, which is part of his tripartite classification of authority, because of the parallels that can be drawn between traditional forms of charisma, like political and/or military leadership, and the spectacle of modern celebrities.

Weber discusses charisma in relation to two other types of authority: legal authority and traditional authority. According to Weber, bureaucratic power is the most legitimate type of legal authority and is concerned with rational thought and the “replacement of tradition by rules.” Traditional authority is preordained and passed down through traditional means, as is the case in patrimonial governments in which power is gained through biological or social relationships.

According to Adair-Toteff, each of these types of authority are servants “in traditional authority the person serves the ‘community,’ in legal authority the person serves in his or her capacity for interpreting the rules.” This service to community or the rules leads to the mundane nature of legal and traditional authority where these types of authority have an “everydayness” about them, whereas charismatic authority has an extraordinariness about it.

In contrast to legal and traditional authority, charismatic authority is less concerned with bureaucracy and rules and deals with personal qualities and the

\[12 \text{ Adair-Toteff pg. 189}
13 \text{ Adair-Toteff pg. 190}
14 \text{ Adair-Toteff pg. 190}\]
relationship between leader and followers or, in the case of celebrity, celebrity and fans. In Weber’s tripartite classification of authority, charismatic domination is the opposite of bureaucratic domination.\textsuperscript{15} While bureaucratic domination or legal authority is concerned with domination through laws and rules, charismatic domination relies on followers to continue to legitimize the authority.\textsuperscript{16} This does not mean that charismatic authority cannot coexist with legal and traditional authority. Rather, according to Weber, at any time authority may be a complicated combination of the three.

According to Weber, charisma is “applied to a certain quality of an individual endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.”\textsuperscript{17} These powers may include spiritual transcendence, like religious prophets, physical prowess, as shown in Olympic athletes, special personality traits, like leadership abilities, or performance abilities, like singing or dancing abilities. Charismatic people are recognized by their followers as having extraordinary powers or abilities and are seen as charismatic leaders based on their follower’s devotion, even if no one outside of their followers recognize them as a charismatic leader. Charismatic authority does not depend on any institutional approval and is not bound by the success or failure of any institution. Conversely, charismatic people, while creating a specific type of symbol for their

\textsuperscript{15} Weber in Marshall pg. 57
\textsuperscript{16} This is similar to how both hegemony and militarization function. None of these are simply forced upon followers, but gain their power from the acceptance of followers.
\textsuperscript{17} Weber in Marshall pg. 61
followers to rally behind, are also divisive characters to some members of society who do not identify as fans or followers.

1.6 Cult of Celebrity

According to Robert Garland, ‘the cult of celebrity’ functions in the following ways. “To start with, it creates positive role models that arouse in others the desire to imitate the same values that those role models exemplify.”\(^{18}\) This ties in clearly with the idea of the celebrity in a capitalist society where the celebrity serves as a constant reminder of what the individual has or lacks, and provides a goalpost for the individual to strive to reach. However, Garland furthers this to suggest that the cult of celebrity also operates by encouraging the individual to emulate social and cultural values that are highlighted by the celebrity.

The cult of celebrity also “stimulates a spirit of competitiveness in ways that are at times highly beneficial to society, in particular by encouraging [individuals] to perform acts of public generosity.”\(^{19}\) This ‘spirit of competitiveness’ also fits in to the idea of the celebrity in a capitalist society and the notion of ‘keeping up with the Joneses,’ but Garland once again focuses on the aspect of the celebrity encouraging the individual to contribute to the greater good.

Garland argues that the “third benefit [derived] from a celebrity culture is that it helps to unify, even to stabilize society.”\(^{20}\) This concept is of central importance to the

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\(^{18}\) Garland pg. 486
\(^{19}\) Garland pg. 486
\(^{20}\) Garland pg. 487
further analysis of celebrity, particularly the analysis of the militarized celebrity in the case studies in this dissertation. In times of peace and war celebrity images are clearly used to unite the masses behind a common cause. In a sense, celebrities are used to ‘sell’ an idea of how society should be. Though, at their core, celebrities sell themselves. The celebrity is the commodity and they are, in turn, used to sell commodities.

Frank Furedi argues that “[i]mitation is a significant dimension of celebrity culture. People are not only encouraged to imitate a role model’s style of appearance but also their habits and emotional behavior.”\textsuperscript{21} This imitation and desire to imitate celebrities is not only used to sell products but are also products in and of themselves. Ellis Cashmore, Thorstein Veblen, and Christopher Lasch tie the imitation of celebrity into Weber’s concept of charisma.

Like today’s celebrities, charismatic figures were considered to be possessors of gifts or special powers. By imputing such properties, followers provided accreditation for charismatic figures. Similarly, consumers today impute properties to celebrities, but they are properties that effectively undermine charisma and reduce everything and everyone to the dimensions of commodities things that, as Christopher Lasch put it, ‘alleviate boredom and satisfy the socially stimulated desire for novelty and excitement.’\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Furedi pg. 495
\textsuperscript{22} Cashmore pg. 408, Veblen pg. 24, and Lasch pg. 521
The individual cannot satisfy this desire by living like a celebrity because the celebrity represents a false attainability. The desire and the inability to fulfill the desire is in constant tension and can only be partially appeased through acquiring commodities.

Celebrities also negotiate and represent stereotypes publicly. Richard Dyer argues that stereotypes are a “a form of ‘ordering’ the mass of complex and inchoate data that we receive from the world are only a particular form – to do with the representation and categorization of persons – of the wider process by which any human society, and individuals within it, make sense of that society through generalities, patternings, and ‘typifications.” Celebrities’ adherence to and disregard for stereotypes play on a large scale while these same struggles play out in the lives of their fans on an individual level.

Marshall argues that “it is the capacity of these public figures to embody the collective in the individual, which identifies their cultural signs as powerful.” Though, Marshall continues, “celebrities are attempts to contain the mass. The mass is the site par excellence of affective power, a kind of power that is seen to be very volatile and dangerous but also very desirable if it can be housed effectively.” However, celebrities occupy a segregated place in culture and society. They are exalted and vilified. They are worshiped and damned. They are valued specifically for their separation from the mass and discounted for that same separation. Additionally, celebrity is never fully accepted.

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23 In this dissertation this is particularly seen with Joe Louis.
24 Dyer pg. 12
25 Marshall pg. 243
26 Marshall location pg. 243
For every fan who accepts a celebrity and reinforces the celebrity’s status through their recognition of it, there is the counterpoint of someone who is not a fan and finds the celebrity divisive. This is a central theme in the case studies of Joe Louis and Elvis Presley. Both where valued and validated by their fans but, at the same time, discounted and despised by others not in their fan groups. Therefore, celebrity can never truly ‘contain the mass,’ but can influence portions of the masses.

1.7 Romanticizing and Aestheticizing the Military

According to Pearl James, “[r]omantic diction such as “glory” and “sacrifice” disguise the ugly facts of wounding, killing, and death. Before considering how this indictment has been assimilated in the decades since its publication, it is instructive to consider what provoked it.”

When discussing war, General William T. Sherman stated, “[t]here's many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory but it is all hell.” Military public affairs offices have long focused on the romance of war and strove to hide the bodies. In WWI, “[a]n affirmative and inspiring attitude toward war, preached by guardians of tradition like [Oliver Wendell] Holmes and [Theodore] Roosevelt, nurtured by popular writers like [Alan] Seeger and [Arthur Guy] Empey, filled men’s imaginations in 1917. That attitude was sufficiently strong to counter three years of news and propaganda about the atrocities of modern warfare; it was strong enough, even, to temper men’s natural fear of death.”

27 James pg. 124
28 General William T. Sherman
29 Kennedy pg. 184
Many veterans, however, like Stuart Gardner Hunt, who saw combat in both WWII and Korea know differently.

When a person enters military service his lifestyle is completely changed. First, you have given up freedom, in the sense you are not in a position to make your own decisions. Your life is in the hands of others. You do not make the decisions; they are made for you. It does not matter if you agree, because you do not have the right to disagree. Others control you. Your life is for sale. You are told where to go, what you are to do. You are disciplined to obey.

Many men and women want to live this life. In time of war, numerous people can’t wait to enlist. But I am sure that, for many, after they see the horror of war, the enthusiasm wears thin, or disappears.

I myself was one of those eager young people, ready to go fight for our country, willing to accept that my life was a number, disposable on the cheap, and not to question. But when the war was over my reflections centered more on the waste of humanity than on the glory. On my second experience of war, in Korea, I was not as gung ho. I had seen the horror of war. My thinking was more on doing the time and returning home to my family. There is no glory in war, and often enough you have to experience it to understand that fully. 30

According to Hunt, it is vital to experience war before it can be understood, which allows for those who have not served in the military to believe in the romanticized and aestheticized portrayals of war that make the true horrors. Though when war is spatially removed from the American public, as wars since WWI have been, it leads to what Favet refers to as “war at a distance,” or war that is experienced by the general public through

30 Hunt pg. 1
narrative and images.  American authors have played their part in romanticizing and aestheticizing war and its true human toll. When discussing William Faulkner’s *Sartoris*, James discussed the importance of a variety of war narration.\(^{32}\) “In the wake of war, then, writers used representational modes such as (but not only) tropes of omission, implication, and inference; gendered metaphors; unreliable narrators; and disjointed, jarring, narrative structures in order to evoke without naming the obscene realities and fantasies that shape the lives of their characters…. [I]njury is disguised, evoked, sanitized, and regendered in modernist writing.”\(^{33}\) These narratives were only spurred on by the desire for romantic notions of war. Barbara Ehrenreich claims that the start of WWI brought about “a veritable frenzy of enthusiasm . . . not for killing or loot . . . but for something far more uplifting and worthy.”\(^{34}\) This enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm that came along with future wars, was not only met on the pages of fiction.

The media, particularly radio, played a part in romanticizing the horrors of war during WWII. Gerd Horton presents two letters to CBS radio host H. V. Kaltenborn highlighting the ‘excitement and romance’ of listening to reports and speeches directly from Europe.

One notion expressed in the correspondence to Kaltenborn was the excitement of being present as historical events unfolded across the Atlantic Ocean: “Columbia’s [CBS] achievement in giving, for the first time in history, an

\(^{31}\) Favet  
\(^{32}\) James pg.171  
\(^{33}\) James pg. 25  
\(^{34}\) Ehrenreich pg. 13
opportunity to its audience to be a witness of history in the making, deserves the highest praise, and your comments are the talk of the town of Hollywood.” The writer went on to state that everyone in Hollywood—from writers and producers to actors and stagehands—was impressed by the drama conveyed by radio. Tied up in this allure was the sense of time traveling and vicarious experience, as well as a palpable apprehension as listeners waited for the next act of the drama: “I am now waiting to listen to Hitler’s speech. I feel the keenest excitement and romance in being able to hear directly from Europe.”

This excitement and romance contributed to war and combat being seen as romantic and dying in battle, though not a new idea, as worthy of valor.

However, the romanticizing and aestheticizing of war and the horrors of war is a sticky topic and one fraught with danger, as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney discussed. “While we cannot exonerate those who commit grave sins against humanity, be they Hitlers, Osama bin Laden, or Onishi [the father of the kamikaze] and the others who brutally cut short the lives of young tokkotai pilots, we must also realize our fragility, which leads us to participate in the evil operations. Above all, we must be aware of the dangers of naturalization, aestheticization, romanticization—cultural and historical processes whereby forces of evil are hardly recognized as such.”

During WWII, Japan romanticized and aestheticized the horrors of war through the:

creation of “war deities” (gunshin)—the apotheosis of war heroes as deities. The term “war-deities” originally referred to deities who guarded warriors. But the

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35 Horten pg. 23
36 Ohnuki-Tierney pg. 23

“Letters to HV Keltenborn: the first one was from a woman listener in Los Angeles, September 27, 1938; the second one came from Rosalie Roberts in Texas, September 26, 1938; Keltenborn Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin”
Meiji government refashioned the term to mean deified soldiers as a strategy to encourage soldiers to plunge to death as an honorable act and for the people not to object their sacrifice. The government first resurrected past heroes who had fought on behalf of the emperors, making them models of loyal soldiers. An example was the resurrection of Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto, a legendary figure who was said to have conquered the Kumaso in the west and the Emishi in the northeast.[37]

1.8 Stewart, Louis, & Presley

Celebrity military service was prevalent among celebrities in 20th century America, particularly in WWII, and was used by the military to further its agenda of gaining support and recruits for the military. Most celebrities served before they were famous and, as such, did not garner the same type of attention while they served as they did after they became famous. Yet, there are examples of celebrity military service that show the tension between military service and celebrity status and draw attention to the ways in which the celebrity was militarized by both the military and the celebrity’s management.

Though Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley each served in active duty service, they each served in different ways. Stewart served in the Army Air Force as a bomber pilot, appeared in a recruiting film, and was shunned publicity. Even though Stewart directly took part in 20 bombing missions during WWII, the media reports of his

37 Ohnuki-Tierney pg. 112
service masked the horrors of war and the violence and destruction that he, himself, was inflicting, by reading in a similar way to the articles about his career in Hollywood.

This dissertation argues that Jimmy Stewart’s military service was focused on death and destruction but was accepted and venerated by the American public because his celebrity identity provided an influential distraction that obscured the death and destruction that bombs dropped by him inflicted. The militarization of Stewart contributed to the masking of the horrors of war in the following ways: 1) by focusing on adventure tropes attached to flying aircraft in propaganda pieces staring Stewart, 2) by the media focusing on Stewart’s celebrity identity and ignoring the reality of combat, even when reporting on combat missions that Stewart took part in, and 3) circulating staged pictures, particularly of Stewart’s homecoming, that glossed over the realities of war.

Louis served in the Army’s Special Services Division and traveled the world doing boxing exhibitions. Louis and his militarization focused on a sanitized, performative violence. This dissertation argues that Louis’s service also played a key role in reinforcing his public identity which was so carefully constructed by Louis and his managers and as a control mechanism for other Black males by presenting an image of the ideal Black male and his role in the war effort as approved by white America, as fighters. The militarization of Joe Louis contributed to the masking of the horrors of war in the following ways: 1) by presenting military service as entertainment through Louis’s service in the Special Services Division, 2) by focusing on the perceived transfer of Louis’s power to the war effort, and 3) by presenting performed, controlled, sanitized violence through Louis’s boxing bouts and images of Louis with military machinery.
Finally, Presley served in the 3rd Armored Division as a truck driver. Unlike Stewart and Louis, Presley’s service received limited publicity while in active duty but extensive militarization after his military service. This dissertation argues that Presley’s public image was so altered by his military service that it saved his career as an entertainer. The militarization of Elvis Presley contributed to the masking of the horrors of war in the following ways: 1) the lack of information about Presley’s military service released by the military made the media the main source of information about Presley’s military service, 2) the use of military images and themes by Presley’s management presented an idealized and sanitized version of military service, even after his death, and 3) Presley’s militarization can be seen as having transformed his celebrity identity and career.

While all three case studies use celebrity to draw a thin veil across the horrors of war thereby mediating social contradictions, only Jimmy Stewart actually took part in combat missions. Louis and Presley mediated social contradictions in a way that Stewart did not. Louis was a contradiction between the U.S. and an increasingly mobilized and disaffected Black community, which the U.S. needed to fight WWII. Louis’s military service served as a symbol of Black advancement while also helping to draw the Black community, that was proud of its fighter, toward the state and its military institutions. Presley mediated the social contradiction between the U.S. and an emergent youth culture that was in conversation with Black culture and was open to new gender norms. The power of this youth culture and its enormous potential to cause conflict in the U.S. was seen a decade later during the Vietnam War. In danger of flaming out, Presley and his
manager used his military service to reassert a more traditional masculine persona. Additionally, his military service provided a bridge between the younger generation and the military state.

Part of the role of celebrity is to undergo its own negation through military service. The fact that Stewart, Louis, and Presley did not use their privilege to escape military service reaffirms the democracy which the U.S. claimed to stand for and that no matter how famous a person was, s/he was an everyman, in theory, and expected to serve along other everymen. However, all three celebrities lent their charisma to the military and glamorized the military, making it hip and cool.
Chapter 2- Militarization

2.1 Argument

This dissertation argues that militarization gains its power from its known, but often overlooked, presence in non-traditional spaces, like celebrity and popular culture. The military's use of popular culture, a site of soft power, makes militarization appear benign while actually cementing its power culturally and politically. The colonization of popular culture by military images also advances through penetration of new modes of media and entanglement with new social, cultural, and political issues. The celebrity, as an easily recognized public identity and popular culture symbol who lives a public, but imagined life, provides a vehicle of recognition where militarization can be furthered in a way that would not be possible to achieve with an average citizen.

2.2 Definition of Militarization

Different fields of study define militarization and militarism differently. In general, militarization is a process while militarism presents the military as important and central. Economists, like Seymour Melmen, concern their work with the interaction between the military and the economy with particular focus on things like the military
industrial complex and the Gross National Product. Political scientists, like Ivo K. Feierabend and Rosalind L. Feierabend, focus on the interaction between politics and the military and military actions and the influence that each has on the other. Gender Studies researchers, like Cynthia Enloe, are concerned with the relationship between militarization and gender. These approaches are all valid within their respective fields, however, a discussion of militarization informed by Cultural Studies requires a definition that does not necessitate the direct participation of the military and discusses the cultural processes through which processes of militarization colonize spaces not traditionally associated with the military, military images, or military values. Many current definitions of militarization are too tied to military action and intervention, too tied to the time of the buildup of military action, and too concerned with explicit military violence.

\[ \text{38 Melman} \]
\[ \text{39 Feierabend and Feierabend claim that “traditional militarization theory argues that as the armed forces increase their influence in government, because of an increase in their capabilities, the state becomes more likely to adopt aggressive foreign policy that can lead to war.”} \]
\[ \text{Feierabend and Feierabend pg. 1} \]
\[ \text{40 In relation to the militarization of women, Enloe offers the definition that “militarization is a step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria.”} \]
\[ \text{Enloe pg. 291} \]
\[ \text{41 According to Gillis, “militarism is the older concept, usually defined as either the dominance of the military over civilian authority, or, more generally, as the prevalence of warlike values in a society. Militarization, on the other hand, does not imply the formal dominance of the military or the triumph of a particular ideology. Instead, it is defined here as ‘the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence.’”} \]
\[ \text{Gillis pg. 1} \]
\[ \text{Koistinen defines militarization as “the impact of war preparation on society.”} \]
\[ \text{Koistinen in Gillis pg. 47} \]
Militarization can operate without and outside of all of these things. Neil Balan argues that militarization deals with “the social and cultural power of coercive military logics, and the colonization of ostensibly non-military environments by adversarial military agents, materials and methods.” Balan’s definition offers an important aspect of militarization to this study because he introduces the concepts of the insertion of ‘social and cultural power’ of the military into ‘non-military environments.’ While his definition’s reliance on ‘military agents’ can be read as the requirement for direct action by the military in the colonization of non-military spaces and military action, direct action by the military is not necessary for militarization to occur. Militarization is not exclusive to the military and permeates culture and society.

For the purpose of this dissertation, militarization is defined as the inhabitance of and colonization of unexpected and non-traditional spaces by military imagery and values. Militarization normalizes the military and war. It is through the militarization of culture that “war is always on our minds,” no matter if a person is in support of or against war and the military, and “no one in the world today is untouched by militarism.” Similar to hegemony, militarization deals with a “general predominance which includes,

Enloe offers the definition that “militarization is a step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria.”

Enloe pg. 291


43 Gusterson

44 Gusterson pg. 156
as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships.”

Like hegemony, this ‘way of seeing the world’ that is presented through militarization “is seen to depend for its hold not only on its expression of the interests of a ruling class, but also on its acceptance as ‘normal reality’ or ‘commonsense’ by those in practice subordinated to it.” The process of militarization does not function simply through inculcation; rather, it also sparks discourse and debate and is able to fold back oppositional discourse into itself. As Foucault expressed, this “incitement to discourse” creates both discourse and debate about the military and war that perversely adds to the allure of war.

Militarization, as a social and cultural process, gains it power through the inhabitance of and colonization of other, often unexpected, spaces, the ability to appear normal, and the flexibility to address new cultural and social issues and adapt to new cultural and social media. This ability to adapt to new social and cultural media and address new cultural and social issues is central to this project, in that celebrities provide a vehicle for militarization to be inscribed on a widely recognized public individual.

As a social and cultural process, militarization partly relies on spaces that are pervasive throughout society and cannot be escaped. Popular culture provides this rich type of space for militarization for several reasons. First, popular culture is part of the

45 Williams pg. 100
46 Williams pg. 145
spectacle. According to Guy Debord, “[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.”\textsuperscript{47} This collection of images influences the masses socially, culturally, politically, economically, and militarily. Though the spectacle is not simply ornamentation or pretty wrapping paper, the spectacle:

is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society’s unreality. In all of its particular manifestations – news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment – the spectacle represents the dominant model or life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production. In both form and content the spectacle serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system.\textsuperscript{48}

It is the spectacle’s ability to hide the real stakes behind decoration that makes the spectacle powerful and it is precisely this ability to hide that makes the spectacle an ideal space for militarization.

At face value it may seem counterintuitive for something to be both visible and invisible, as the two are set up in direct opposition to each other linguistically. However, things, ideas, and even places can be both simultaneously seen and unseen. Carol Delaney defines invisible spaces as “spaces that are somewhat hidden from our everyday

\textsuperscript{47} Debord pg. 7
\textsuperscript{48} Debord pg. 8
“lives.” Though these spaces inhabit physical space and are recognized as part of our everyday landscape, they are places that we see continually but do not consciously notice until we need them—like hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons. In a similar manner as invisible spaces, militarization occupies an invisible part of our everyday life but, unlike invisible spaces it has more to do with the prevalence and saturation of militarization in the world around us. It is because of militarization’s visibility and prevalence within the spectacle that makes it, at times, easily overlooked.

The chapters that follow discuss the ways in which militarization gains it power by using popular culture in order to appear normal. The cultural texts discussed below provide a basis to move from analyzing the militarization of a text to the militarization of celebrity, as will be done in the case studies on Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley.

49 Delaney pg. 62-63
Chapter 3 – Celebrity

3.1 Celebrity

The term celebrity refers to both a process and an individual. Celebrity is “the phenomenon by which a certain individual attracts, in the eyes of many others, an unconditional admiration and interest.”\(^{50}\) “The term celebrity is not simply a noun but an adjective that signifies that someone possesses the quality of attracting attention.”\(^{51}\) Additionally, “[c]elebrities are individuals who have achieved a level of fame that makes them well known in society.”\(^{52}\)

According to Debord, the celebrity is a “spectacular representation of a living human being.”\(^{53}\) Whereas celebrity, the process, is a “shallow spectacle of a role and life style.”\(^{54}\) The extraordinary lives of stars have become an obsession of the American public. According to DeBord, “[s]tars – spectacular representations of living human beings – project this general banality into images of permitted roles. As specialists of apparent life, stars serve as superficial objects that people can identify with in order to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations that they actually live.”\(^{55}\)

\(^{50}\) Alberoni in Marshall pg. 110  
\(^{51}\) Furedi pg. 493  
\(^{52}\) Young and Pinsky pg.464  
\(^{53}\) Debord pg. 60  
\(^{54}\) http://culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com/2011/05/guy-debord-society-of-spectacle-summary_1357.html  
\(^{55}\) Debord pg. 29
Stars act as innovators who create new lifestyles and images from real or imagined lifestyles, or images that already exist within society, but just below the surface. “The manifestation of charisma [in this case, Debord is referring to the 'imagined life' that stars lead] which concerns us presupposes, therefore, a stable social structure – that is, a system of pre-established and internalized roles, of such kind that the sharing in charisma does not result in the restructuring of habitual systems of action.” This ‘system of pre-existing and internalized roles’ allow stars’ lifestyles to exist within the standing structure while still presenting a spectacle.

Dyer claims that “[t]he general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American dream, organized around the themes of consumption, success, and ordinariness.” Stars, through the construction and marketing of their lives, offer an imagined lifestyle that contains just enough of a resemblance to reality that fans can believe that their lifestyle actually exists, that the star actually lives that reality, and that that lifestyle is actually attainable by, not only the star, but by regular people. Debord argues that “[p]assing into the spectacle as a model for identification, the agent [star] renounces all autonomous qualities in order to identify himself with the general law of obedience to the course of things.” It is important to remember that stars are

56 Alberoni in Marshall pg. 111
57 Dyer in Marshall pg. 154
58 Debord pg. 61
legitimated by their fans and, as such, are approved by fans but still represent divisive characters for people who do not count themselves among their fans.

Certain amounts of innovation are allowed by society; however, this innovation must match with what is acceptable to and exists within society and this is closely monitored and checked by those in society who are not fans. Socially, a celebrity would not have been allowed to succeed if s/he did not voice some part of social reality, even if it was just below the surface or, in Williams’ terms, emergent. However, only so much deviation is allowed and, as will be discussed in the case studies of Joe Louis and Elvis Presley, one remedy for threatening deviation is militarization.

According to Debord, "[c]elebrities exist to act out various styles of living and viewing society unfettered, free to express themselves globally."59 Due to the imagined and performed aspects of celebrities’ imagined lifestyles, such as the transformation from rags-to-riches stories and the focus on leisure activities, celebrities' imagined lifestyles suggest that there is a way to escape (or, rather, limit) subjectivity and enact agency free of social and cultural influence.

3.2 Stars and the Spectacle

Celebrities are social constructs, creations that only perform as an individual, not, in fact, an individual themselves. According to Cashmore, “[c]elebrities are incubated in the mind: they exist outside time and space and reside only in the imagination without

59 Debord thesis #60
physical or concrete existence. Consumers engage with ideas rather than events."\textsuperscript{60} Yes, celebrities, as people, have corporeal existences, but it is not this corporeal existence which makes them a celebrity; it is the ideas that are imagined about them that make them celebrities. "The admirable people in whom the system personifies itself are well known for not being what they are; they became great men by stooping below the reality of the smallest individual life, and everyone knows it."\textsuperscript{61}

Also, according to DeBord, "the function of...celebrities is to act out various lifestyles or socio-political viewpoints in a full, totally free manner. They embody the inaccessible results of social labour by dramatizing the by-products of that labour...[it is] the decision making and consumption that are at the beginning and the end of that process that is never questioned."\textsuperscript{62} The image of the celebrity is shrewdly constructed by many businessmen. Image is purposefully constructed in relation to and opposition to society and other celebrities. A celebrity’s hair, music, clothes, and lifestyle is dictated and directed by managers. This direction is completely behind the scenes and is only uncovered in hindsight. In the cases of Joe Louis and Elvis Presley, both of their management teams were highly involved in not only the construction of their celebrity identities but also the regeneration of their celebrity identities through militarization.

\textsuperscript{60} Cashmore pg. 407
\textsuperscript{61} Debord thesis #61
\textsuperscript{62} Debord pg. 29
The image of the celebrity totally masks the labor, the planning, the preparation, the practice, and the preening that goes into creating the celebrity. According to Dyer, [s]tardom is an image of the way stars live. For the most part, this generalised (sic) life-style is the assumed backdrop for the specific personality of the star and the details and events of his or her life. As it combines the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary, and is seen as an articulation of basic American/Western values, there is no conflict here between the general life-style and the particularities of the star.\textsuperscript{63}

At this point it must be noted that charisma is not the same as celebrity. Celebrities are charismatic and have charismatic qualities. Yet, there is also an ordinariness to celebrities that, according to Dyer, can be traced to “several contradictory elements: (i) that ordinariness is the hallmark of the star; (ii) that the system rewards talent and ‘specialness’; (iii) that luck, ‘breaks’, which may happen to anyone and typify the career of the star; and (iv) that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom.”\textsuperscript{64} As Dyer claims, ‘ordinariness is the hallmark of the celebrity’ and this is clearly seen in rise to fame stories that focus on a celebrity’s ordinariness to validate or authenticate the celebrity’s talent and celebrity status. Additionally, this authenticity and

\textsuperscript{63} Dyer in Marshall pg. 154
\textsuperscript{64} Dyer in Marshall pg. 157
ordinariness are used to suggest to fans that they share a common ordinariness with the
celebrity.

Max Weber argues that people endowed with charismatic authority “…must stand
outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations, as well as outside the
routine obligations of family life.” 65 Celebrities’ lifestyles allow them to do this and
present a hint of ordinariness that can often be traced to the story of their rise to fame that
provides a partial mask to the spectacle of celebrity. However, their lives are outside of
routine 9-5 occupations through extraordinary occupations like being a successful singer
or actor, and outside of the routine obligations of family life through the employ of the
service of personal chefs, maids, nannies, and dog walkers. Even activities that could be
interpreted as ordinary are carried out with different intentions. For example, “activities
such as sport or the arts are not pursued for health or enlightenment but for the sake of
displaying the leisure time and money at one’s disposal.” 66 As stated previously, their
entire lives are performances.

This “paradox of the extravagant life-style and success of the stars being
perceived as ordinary” may be viewed in two ways, as presented by Dyer. 67 First, it is
possible to view celebrities as “ordinary people” who live “more expensively” than the
rest of society, though this does not “transform” the celebrity. Second, that wealth and

65 Weber in Marshall pg. 57
66 Dyer in Marshall pg. 155
67 Dyer in Marshall pg. 158
success experienced by celebrities isolates “certain human qualities (the qualities they stand for).” Additionally, these human qualities are not “muddied by material considerations or problems.” Summing up, celebrities are largely absent from the “day-to-day existence of society.” This absence makes the celebrity, his or her persona, and his or her image more alluring to fans.

While celebrities provide an imagined reality, this imagined reality all the while maintains and reinforces hegemony or the dominant culture. In America, celebrity creates unfulfilled and unfulfillable wants. “Consumers under capitalism do not experience unifying fulfillment when desire is matched with possession. For the abstract quality of desire means that wants are never satisfied by possessing a particular commodity. Consumers are indeed split subjects. They are probably split along several axes, the most important of which, in celebrity culture, is the split between having and wanting.” This wanting through celebrity status is unattainable for the majority of the population. Central to the discussion of charisma is that “[c]harisma can only be ‘awakened’ and ‘tested’; it cannot be ‘learned’ or ‘taught.’” Hard work through labor may allow a small percentage of the population to acquire wealth and consume more, but this is very different from celebrity which is guided by charisma and the recognition of charisma by fans. The celebrity “does not necessarily show competence in other

68 Dyer in Marshall pg. 158-159
69 Rojek pg. 187
70 Weber in Marshall pg. 67
This specialization prohibits general charisma, in the form of celebrity, from acquiring institutional authority. Schickel argues that “there was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century.” This argument has everything to do with Schickel basing his understanding of celebrity, the reliance of present day celebrity on the media, and the necessity of the media’s role in the construction of an imagined intimacy with a celebrity. Though he admits that some were renowned like celebrities prior to the twentieth century, this renown was “based on a palpable reality,” a physical closeness. However, when applying Weber’s concept of charisma to the idea of celebrity and the fame celebrated by celebrity is as old as history, or rather, the written word that history is based on, itself, though it has taken many different forms. “Historical studies of celebrity claim that although this phenomenon has a long history, it has become transformed through technological innovations such as the cinema, popular press, and television.” Additionally, celebrity has changed socially and culturally throughout time, but have remained continually recognizable. Cashmore states that “[f]or…all those who see celebrity culture as an element of a continuous historical sequence, there are no

71 Alberoni in Marshall pg. 111
72 Yes, admittedly there have been several entertainers who have acquired institutional authority, like Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Jesse Ventura. While their charisma and celebrity may have made them more popularly known, these individuals have participated in the highly structured election and voting practices in the United States rather than being granted office based on their charisma and celebrity alone. Donald Trump is a bit murkier all together because of his role as both celebrity and businessman or celebrity businessman.
73 Schickel pg. 23
74 Schickel pg. 25
75 Furedi pg. 493
anachronisms: the customs, events and objects of today’s celebrity culture are updated versions of those found in previous cultural epochs.”76 The ability to utilize new media and flexibility to address the changes of culture and society is something shared by both celebrity and militarization.

With the advent of new technology celebrities were able to disseminate themselves and their product more widely and in more mediums than previously available. Voice recording allowed the celebrities’ voices to be heard without being physically near. Photographs allowed the celebrities’ images to be recreated with less artistic interpretation than in a painting or a sculpture. Motion pictures presented the physical movements of the celebrity to the masses and placed their actions in both recognizable and fantastic scenes. These forms of technology allowed the celebrity image to be disseminated.

3.3 The Militarized Celebrity
The militarized celebrity constitutes its own distinct identity. For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary for the celebrity to serve in the same way as a ‘regular soldier;’ in fact, it is impossible for a celebrity to serve as a ‘regular soldier’ simply because his/her celebrity status makes him/her already otherworldly/imagined. Jimmy Stewart served as a bomber pilot in Europe during WWII, though his celebrity always followed him and was one of the first things mentioned in media coverage of his service.

76 Cashmore pg. 406
Joe Louis served in the Army’s Special Services Division, a division reserved for entertainers, and toured military bases both in the US and abroad putting on boxing displays and fighting bouts. Elvis Presley, on the other hand, did not serve in Special Services and was assigned to an Armored Division, as it was decided that, out of concern for security on the Kassern (a military base in Germany) and for the safety of his fans who may try to scale the fence of the base to catch a glimpse of the star, it would be best for Presley to live off base. Just being himself was a distraction from and drew attention to the military’s duties. Such distinctions can be seen in the media representations featured in Figures 9, 10, and 11.
Figure 1: Maj. Jimmy Stewart talking with the crew of a B-24 named "Betty."
After Talking With Mike Jacobs, Louis Doesn’t Want To Retire

New York—Sgt. Joe Louis gave up his heavyweight title and retired from the ring for about 24 hours last week.

The Brown Bomber ran into an Associated Press reporter between the halves of the Fort Riley-Creighton University football game in Omaha, where he was appearing in a close-order drill exhibition with his cavalry outfit. He told the reporter he was all through with boxing.

"By the time this war's over I'll be in my 30s and that's too old for a fighter," he said. "My fightin' days are over."

So the news flashed around the country. But when Mike Jacobs, the ruler of the boxing industry, heard about it in New York he called the sergeant long distance.

Jacobs reported that Louis had been misquoted and had no intentions of quitting the ring. "I had no such idea in mind," Jacobs said that Louis told Jacobs.

Incidentally, Louis is said to owe Jacobs $56,805.50.

John Roxborough, the sergeant's manager, also talked with the champion over the phone. "Joe may retire after the war is over, if he's too old then to continue fighting," Roxborough explained. "But he was misquoted by that reporter. He only meant he is through with fighting while he's in the army."

Incidentally, Louis is said to owe Roxborough $41,148.03.

Meanwhile in Cleveland, Jimmy Johnston quickly claimed the title for his client, Bob Pastor. "Pastor has beaten every other top-notch contender," Johnston cried.

At Fort Riley, when he was asked about the statements of Roxborough and Jacobs, Sgt. Louis said: "I have no comment."

Figure 2: Joe Louis in Yank Magazine, October 21, 1942
Additionally, the media coverage, products, and attention that come with celebrity military service cannot be replicated by the non-celebrity individual in uniform. This work primarily concerns itself with the active duty service of celebrities who were already famous when entering military service and looks at the interaction between the celebrity’s image as a star and the celebrity’s image as a star in uniform, as their image as a star is always dominantly front and center. Celebrity military service does not generate
the same type of attention without the celebrity’s preexisting fame. The case studies that follow will discuss Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley’s military service and the ways that their service masks the horrors of war.
4.1 Argument
This case study argues that Jimmy Stewart’s active participation in death and destruction as a bomber pilot in WWII was accepted and venerated by the American public because his celebrity identity provided a thin veil that obscured the death and destruction that bombs dropped by him inflicted. The militarization of Jimmy Stewart masked the horrors of war in the following ways: 1) by focusing on adventure tropes attached to flying aircraft in propaganda pieces starring Stewart, 2) with media coverage focusing on Stewart’s celebrity identity and using words and phrases to discuss Stewart’s bombing raids that ignored the reality of combat, even when reporting on combat missions that Stewart took part in, and 3) circulating staged and falsified pictures, particularly of Stewart’s homecoming, that glossed over the realities of war.

4.2 Stewart’s Ties to Family and his Wholesome Identity
The following biography of Brigadier James M. Stewart, which was released by the Air Force in the 1960s, demonstrates the ways in which Stewart’s service was framed, and how he was largely perceived, including the importance of his family ties and background to Jimmy Stewart’s public identity.

Department of the Air Force
Office of Information
Part 1 - Narrative

James Stewart’s childhood was spent in the western Pennsylvania town of Indiana, Pennsylvania, and his time, when not in school, he spent mostly in his father’s hardware store, which had been in the family for many years. His summers were spent in scout camp and participating in family motor trips, and later working in the hardware store.

During his prep school years, he became vitally interested in aviation, radio and dramatics. When his father went overseas as a company commander captain in the ordnance United States Army, James Stewart worked as a projectionist in the town movie theater. In prep school, he was a mediocre, third string football player and if fair-to-middling junior varsity high jumper and high hurdler.

His four years at college brought him a bachelor of science degree in architecture. However, he was prevailed upon to join a dramatic stock company in Massachusetts called the University players, and this was the end of his architectural career and lead to five years on the Broadway stage and, from there, a contract at the metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios in Hollywood.

From 1934-1941, he worked as a motion picture actor and collected, along the line, the Academy award for the best actor of the year and the New York Critic’s award.

He entered the United States Army 22 March 1941 as a private and spent over four years in the service.

After separation in 1945, he returned to motion pictures and is still occupied working in this profession. During this time, he picked up five nominations for the Academy Awards and another New York Critic’s prize.

He was elected trustee of Princeton University for the term 1963 and is currently on the Board of Directors of project hope of the people-to-people health foundation.
Mr. James Stewart sets aside one month of his time each year for extensive trips with his entire family, which she considers of primary importance.  

Framed in this way, Jimmy Stewart provided the United States with an uncontroversial celebrity in a time of uncertainty, and a recognizable war hero to root for and, as such, Stewart and his service provided the model that every celebrity that has served in the military since his induction has been held up to. Jimmy Stewart is one of the most well-known celebrities to have served in the military while famous. His celebrity image provided a near perfect hero for the American public during WWII.

In part, his celebrity identity was built upon his image of unthreatening masculinity; that is, Stewart was known for his thin and gangly frame. His aesthetic, however, created a problem for MGM, the studio for which he worked, as his lanky physicality was nearly impossible to sell as a leading man or a heart throb. At the time he began working in Hollywood, he was 6’4” and weighed only 130 lbs. According to Dennis Bingham and Allen Eyles, attempts to make him appear more rugged and athletic through strategically staged photo shoots with athletic props in outdoorsy locals (as had been done with other male stars) did not work with Stewart. Instead, “His simplicity

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78 Fact Sheet from the Air Force Office of Information, Public Information Division, post- 1959 Official Military Personnel Files of James M. Stewart, National Archives

Narratives and fact sheets like this were reserved for notable service members and Stewart’s celebrity led to one being created for him. Even though, this narrative is extensive by Army standards, even for a celebrity.

79 Bingham pg. 25, Eyles pg. 42
was emphasized; one press release described Stewart’s preference for a “beat-up windbreaker” over a “three-piece business suit.”\(^8^0\) Apparently the adage is true: the clothes do make the man. Stewart’s preference for clothes that were worn by everyday men across the country reinforced his image as an elevated everyday man. This image was not short lived, in fact, “[t]he image of Jimmy Stewart as American hero – decent, hardworking, loyal, with an air of the rural, the unsophisticated (despite a degree from Princeton), and the inarticulate (with his famous stammer) – stayed constant throughout his career even when his [later] film roles [, such as Rear Window (1954), and Vertigo (1958)] varied from it.”\(^8^1\)

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\(^{8^0}\) Bingham pg. 25 and Robbins pg. 39

\(^{8^1}\) Bingham pg. 25
Hollywood and Stewart’s studio used his background to build his celebrity image. Stewart was a small-town Pennsylvania boy-next-door whose small family owned a hardware store and had a history of military service. Unlike some Hollywood stars of the time who left their past completely behind while trying to make a name in movies, Stewart’s ties to Indiana, PA were strong and were credited with keeping Stewart grounded. One example of these ties is that the Oscar that Stewart won for *The Philadelphia Story*— the only Oscar he won— was on display in the small local hardware store for 25 years.
4.3 Distinction Between Boy and Man

Through advertising, a clear distinction was made between the actor and the service man. While movies and ads billed him as ‘James Stewart’ throughout his career, he started to be referred to as the familiar and diminutive, ‘Jimmy Stewart.’ This simple change in name transferred the familiarity carried with the name ‘Jimmy’ onto ‘James’ the actor. “A formal distinction was thus set up between ‘Jimmy,’ the ‘upright average man’ who is everybody’s friend, and ‘James,’ the actor. The result was a commodity that combined perceptions of the artist, the film image, and the ‘real’ person.”82 Additionally, the use of the name ‘Jimmy’ added innocence and a non-threatening air to the actor’s image. ‘James’ is the formal name of a man, whereas the name ‘Jimmy’ has a boyish nature that Jimmy Stewart was recognized as possessing, both on and off screen. For him, the use of the name ‘Jimmy’ strengthened his boy-next-door image.

This image is again reinforced in one of Stewart’s most popular roles, the role of Boy Ranger turned Senator, Jefferson Smith in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939). Jefferson Smith is presented as a boy grown enough to participate in certain adult activities, but only does so in a childlike way. For example, while courting Senator Paine’s beautiful daughter, Susan, Smith speaks of her with wonder and, when asked about the women in DC by a reporter, stammers, “Well--I haven't seen many--oh--well--Miss Susan Paine--she's about the prettiest girl I--I *ever* saw.”83 With this one

82 Bingham pg. 25-26
83 Mr. Smith Goes to Washington
statement it is obvious that Smith is smitten with Susan Paine in the same way a
schoolboy would be with a pretty girl in his class and that Smith is inexperienced with
women.

As the film progresses and the Senate convenes, Smith bonds with one of the few
true allies he has, Richard Jones, a pageboy in the Senate. He is more at ease with Jones,
upon whom he bestows the diminutive nickname, Dick, than he is with anyone else in
Washington. Jones shows him the ropes in a kind manner that Smith had not experienced
previously in Washington and, in thanks, he gifts Jones a Boy Ranger pin. By the end of
the film all of the Senate pageboys had been given a Boy Ranger pin, showing that Smith
continued representing the innocence of childhood. Smith’s relationship with Jones,
though it does not occupy much screen time, is poignant because it shows that Smith is
more comfortable with the wholesomeness of youth.

Governor Hopper’s son’s character, Jackie, also acts as a conduit to communicate
Smith’s boy-like charm. Jackie Hopper publicly presents a gift to Smith at the banquet
celebrating his being named a Senator and stumbles through a prepared speech in a
manner that the viewer later sees repeated by Smith when speaking from the Senate floor.
When Jackie is at his most nervous, he reverts to the way that he normally speaks and
talks about Smith, in a familiar and colloquial way:

There is a silence in the hall as Jackie wets his lips and addresses Smith.

JACKIE
(stumbling and nervous with a memorized speech)
Senator Jefferson Smith--we are very proud on this great occas--the Boy Rangers take this oppor--uh--

(lifts the package)

--in token of their--uh--in token of this--

(breaking off, ad libbing)

--It's a briefcase, Jeff! All the kids pitched in! It's for to carry your laws when you get there!84

Even the way that Stewart spoke when he portrayed the character in the film highlighted the character’s wholesomeness and naivety. In contrast to the machine gun cadence in which the other actors in the film delivered their lines—a cadence that was standard for movies of the day—Stewart delivered his lines in a slow, shy, soft spoken drawl that highlighted his character’s inexperience and wide-eyed innocence. His tempo slowly sped up leading to the climactic filibuster scene, only to slow down again as the filibuster drug on, as Smith read the Constitution and reminded himself of why he was in Washington in the first place: to uphold his staunch belief in the United States and the purity of Democracy. The perceived wholesomeness and naivety of the character bled

84 *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
over to Jimmy Stewart’s public identity just as Stewart’s public identity informed the role of Jefferson Smith.

Throughout the script Smith is referred to as ‘boy,’ with few exceptions, something that was also common in articles about Stewart. Smith’s name is brought up to Governor Hopper by his children at the dinner table. In this conversation Hopper mistakes Smith for a boy, an impression that follows Smith the character through the movie and, in a similar way, Stewart the actor throughout his life.

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HUBERT
You, too! Fine. Fine. That's everybody heard from. Forgive my abysmal ignorance--but I don't know Jefferson Smith from a--

PETER
Gosh, Pop--head of the Boy Rangers!

HUBERT
Oh, a *boy*!

JIMMY
No, *no*!, Pop--Jeff's a *man*! Jeff Smith! Biggest expert we got on wild game--and animals--and rocks.

PETER
Yes, and right now he's the greatest hero we ever had. It's all over the headlines--

JIMMY
Sure. Didn't you see about the terrific forest fire all around Sweetwater?
HUBERT
I did. What about it?

PETER
Well, Jeff put that out himself.

HUBERT
Himself!

JIMMIE
Well--Jeff and the Rangers. He was out camping with 'em--and they saved hundreds of people and millions of dollars--

In the exchange above, the children are the only ones who recognize that Smith is a man and they are the only ones who know about his accomplishments. Throughout the rest of the film Smith is continually referred to as a ‘boy’ or referenced in childlike ways.

This understanding of the domain of men being separate from the domain of boys similarly appears in media coverage pertaining to Jimmy Stewart, the actor and public personality, particularly in a piece from December 1940 highlighting Hollywood’s most eligible bachelors. The article describes Stewart as possibly dating Olivia De Havilland, a Hollywood actress, depending on which “column you read.” But the rest of the section on Stewart focuses on him as a person and his hobbies, not on any assumed relationship with De Havilland. “At the studio they will tell you Jimmy is a Typical American

85 Mr. Smith Goes to Washington
Boy…From Pennsylvania and a good middle class family; from Princeton and a normal college life; from a handful of stock company and Broadway plays to leads in Hollywood without getting temperamental, Stewart seems to have done about as well for himself and with himself as any fond mother could ask.”

His hobbies, his family, his everyday life, and his good temperament clearly sets him apart from other actors of the day. An article in the Chicago Daily Tribune that highlighted Stewart said that “[h]is offscreen interests are flying, home movies, and radio. His interest in flying dates from when he was 4, when he built a plane out of a pushmobile and some kites and set out on a maiden flight from the roof of the family warehouse at Indiana, PA.” The article grounds Stewart’s identity as an actor, shows him as an everyman, and goes even further to display how Stewart is set apart from other actors of the time.

Another actor that is featured in the article was Cesar Romero, a notorious Hollywood playboy. The section on Romero is substantially shorter and does not discuss Romero’s background, family ties, or hobbies but only on his relationship with famous women. “[Romero] doesn’t seem to go out with one for long enough to make it look serious. His latest companion has been Patricia Morison.” The photos accompanying the article show Romero with Sonja Henie, Romero with June Lang, Romero with Joan

86 Chicago Daily Tribune, December 8, 1940
87 Chicago Daily Tribune, December 8, 1940
88 Chicago Daily Tribune, December 8, 1940
Crawford, Romero with Cobina Wright Jr., Romero with Betty Furness, Romero with Virginia Bruce, Romero with Ann Sheridan, and a large photo of Patricia Morison. In contrast, the photos of Stewart are of him in a cockpit and another of him fiddling with a two-way radio. This contrast between Stewart and his identity being spoken about in relationship to hobbies, particularly childhood hobbies and Romero and his identity being constructed in relationship to his romances with women further delineate Stewart as being boy-like or childlike and Romero being mature or a man.

In contrast to Romero’s, Stewart’s public identity was sexually non-threatening. Unlike Elvis Presley, the concept of ‘boy’ used in relation to Jimmy Stewart is directly tied to idealism and wholesomeness that is linked to childhood rather than immaturity and deviance, as it was with Presley. This wholesomeness always circled back to his family and upbringing. Even once he was an established star, his origin story was front and center. Ed Sullivan dedicated the first two paragraphs of his feature on Jimmy Stewart in his “Looking at Hollywood” column to Stewart’s hometown of Indiana, PA, the day Stewart was born, and deeming his sisters Mary and Virginia the unmarried Stewart’s “greatest pride.” Sullivan then shifted his focus to the source of Stewart’s desire to become an actor.

He tells me he doesn’t know why he became an actor, or when the yen for the stage first expressed itself…He thinks it dates back to 1918…His father, a captain in ordinance, was sailing for France with his division, and Jimmy’s mother took the 8 year-old son to New York to see his father off…Then later, from France, his dad sent him some German trench helmets, so Jimmy started staging war plays in
the little crude theater in the cellar…. [H]e’s certain that if his father hadn’t sent him the helmets, he would never have become an actor.  

The article itself was timely. Though it appeared just under 11 months before his draft eligibility was announced, the article was published during a time of rising hostilities in the war in Europe. The United States had not joined the war effort by supplying men, but did supply money and arms to Allied Forces and fighting in Europe was front page news. Stewart’s wholesome everyman identity reflected the way that America and the American people wanted to see themselves. Family oriented, wholesome, humble, brave and heroic. During WWII it was perceived that any violence carried out by Americans on behalf of Americans was righteous and done in the name of freedom, a most American value.

Sullivan’s feature on Stewart did two important things for the actor. First, it reminded readers of his roots and family, which were not unlike any everyday person. Second, it militarized Jimmy Stewart though his story about his desire to act. Without his father having gone to war, the world may never have known Jimmy Stewart the actor. However, the war and the military were always central to the Stewart family. The long history of military service in the family was passed down to Stewart and his desire to

89 Chicago Daily Tribune, January 10, 1940
serve when World War II was heating up was evident in his reaction to his draft number being selected.

4.4 Draft and Induction

Stewart’s draft number, 126, was drawn in November 1940. This was met by joy on Stewart’s part. According to Sheilah Graham, “Jimmy’s own reaction to the news [of his possible draft] was “Whee!” and again “Whee!” Then, “this is the first lottery I’ve ever won.” And when his excitement had quieted he said, “I will claim no exemption whatsoever.” Stewart had wanted to serve. Family history was a powerful motivator for Stewart, prompting him to serve since a Stewart had served in every American war since the Revolutionary War. Robert Matzen claims, through his fiction-tinged representation of Stewart in *Mission: Jimmy Stewart and the Fight for Europe*, that Stewart's main goal in life was military service and that Stewart saw his draft as a welcome relief from his life and career in Hollywood. However, while presenting itself to be a book dealing with a subject that Stewart himself did not speak of publicly, Matzen injects his own thoughts as those of Stewart’s with no substantive references. What is clear is that, for whatever reason, Stewart was determined to enlist, even when the Army turned him down.

Stewart was drafted and ordered to report for a physical toward the end of 1940 but “Army doctors found that he was ten pounds underweight for his height-weight

90 *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 4, 1940
91 Matzen
ratio.”92 The results of Stewart’s physical were reported widely and even elicited the headlines mocking his failure to meet the Army’s standards.93 “When I was rejected because of being underweight, coast-to-coast headlines blared - Movie Hero Heavy Enough to Knock out Villain But Too Light for Uncle Sam.”94 Stewart appealed the decision and worked on making the weight requirements though a “diet of carbohydrate foods” and entered active duty on March 22, 1941.95

Reports of Stewart’s induction even included the specific route that Stewart and the other 18 inductees would follow to the induction station.96 Needless to say, Stewart was mobbed at his induction. He was positioned front and center for photographs during the induction ceremony and these were featured in newspapers across the country. The publicity was so pervasive that when the heir to the Cudahy meat packing fortune found himself being photographed by a throng of photographers at his own induction ceremony he haughtily protested, “I am not Jimmy Stewart!”97

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92 Smith pg. 29
93 Smith pg. 29-30
94 Dewey pg. iv
95 The Washington Post, March 23, 1941
96 Los Angeles Times, March 14, 1941
97 Los Angeles Times, May 21, 1941

“Whether the intersection of Santa Monica and Westwood Blvds. Early on March 22. They will board a Pacific Electric train at 7:39 a.m. which will transport them to Third and Hill Sts. From there they will march to induction station No. 2 at 106 W. Third St.”
Stewart was drafted into the Army in October 1940 and was immediately recognized by the Army as a propaganda weapon. On March 22, 1941, the day Stewart was inducted into the Army, an article in The Christian Science Monitor briefly discussed actions taken by members of the Army to capitalize on Stewart’s induction and Stewart’s concerns about receiving attention for his service. The article, printed in *The Christian Science Monitor* on March 22, 1941, asserts:

This is IRCFF day for Jimmy Stewart.

The I is for induction: R for reporters, C for cameramen, and FF for feminine fans, who crowded the subway terminal for a farewell glimpse of the movie Academy award winner.

Major Arthur Davidson, commanding officer of the induction station, made certain that Jimmy didn’t slip away unnoticed. He called reporters and cameramen into conference yesterday to plan details.

Despite the early hour, 7 AM, PST, women and girls crowded the terminal and the few blocks along which Mr. Stewart and other conscripts marched to induction headquarters.

Mr. Stewart heard about these preparations and appealed to friends at his studio to try to do something. But he was told, “Son, you’re in the Army...”

For the benefit of young men yet to be called, Major Davidson explained just what the army should mean to Mr. Stewart and other soldiers. Sound reels will repeat his words throughout the nation.99

Also on the day of his induction, the Adjutant General’s office sent the follow message to the Chief of the Air Corps, Major General George H. Brett:

The Motion Picture Unit at Wright Field has requested that Mr. Stewart’s services be made available to that Unit for the purpose of making motion picture shorts for the Air Corps. It is believed that his service would be particularly effective in securing Flying Cadet candidates.

99 The Christian Science Monitor, March 22, 1941
It is believed that his services in the above capacity, in view of his background and experience in the motion picture industry, would stimulate interest in the proposed motion picture program of the Air Corps.\footnote{Message from the Adjutant General of the Army’s Office March 22, 1941 Official Military Personnel Files of James M. Stewart, National Archives}

Aiming to capitalize on his Hollywood career, his stardom, and the boyish innocence he portrayed, the military was well-aware of the ways in which it wanted to utilize him and the means it wanted to. In response to internal Army requests to transfer Stewart to a Motion Picture unit, Col. E. B. Lyon, Commander of the Air Corps, stated that:

Private James M. Stewart (S.S.) 39230721, now on duty at this station, was assigned to the Air Corps at his own request for the purpose of receiving training and performing his duties as a soldier. He does not desire to engage in any phase of Motion Picture activity, or publicity while he is in the Army, and he does not desire to be transferred from this station. He has repeatedly, while at this station, shunned publicity. He wants to be treated exactly as any other American boy drafted into the service of his country.\footnote{Message from Col. E. B. Lyon, Air Corps, Commanding April 16, 1941 Official Military Personnel Files of James M. Stewart, National Archives}

Stewart’s request to shun publicity may have been honored except for one thing: while WWII was a land war, it was also an air war and the United States did not have enough pilots. Stewart had trained as a pilot since the mid-1930s; as of April 17, 1941, Stewart
only required an additional “forty (40) hours of flying time in aircraft of 200 H.P. or over
to fully qualify him for commission as 2nd Lieutenant, Air Corps Reserve.” Stewart had
the means to complete his training “at his own expense at the Palo Alto Airport.” By
this time Stewart had both a private and commercial pilot’s license, owned his own plane
(a Stinson 105), and had logged over 300 hours of flying time. Stewart’s skill as a
pilot allowed him to bargain with the Army in regard to his assignments, within reason.
Stewart brought dual value to the Army with his experience as a pilot and his renown as a
celebrity. The Army was left to decide what would be more beneficial: honoring
Stewart’s wish to avoid publicity and serve as a bomber pilot, transferring Stewart to the
Motion Pictures division, or creating a position that would be a mixture of the two.

Allowing Stewart to serve strictly as a pilot would have honored Stewart’s request
but would not have allowed the military to utilize Stewart in a public relations capacity.
The United States needed pilots, but allowing Stewart to serve as a pilot would only fill
one cockpit. Transferring Stewart to the Motion Picture division would allow the Army
to use his celebrity status to recruit more men into service, but also ran the risk that the
Army would be accused of granting Stewart special treatment. This perceived special
treatment could have had a negative effect on recruiting. The third option would require
the Army to create a special billet for Stewart that was highlighted on his first

102 Message from Brigadier General Henry W. Harms, Air Corps, Commanding April 17, 1941
Official Military Personnel Files of James M. Stewart, National Archives
103 Smith pg. 28
endorsement for the rank of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant in the Air Corps Reserve. Stewart’s recommended mobilization assignments read as follows:

First Priority – Pilot  Additional Training – 90 days
Second Priority – Public Relations  Additional Training - [N/A]
Third Priority – Recruiting Air Corps  Additional Training – 30 days

Remarks: (A brief statement as to this officer’s general value to the service) This approved applicant for appointment as second lieutenant, Air Corps Reserve is a qualified pilot and has demonstrated exceptional piloting ability. He is a noted actor and his services could be utilized to marked advantage as public relations and recruiting duties for Air Corps personnel.\textsuperscript{104}

Thus, while continuing to eschew personal publicity as much as he could, Stewart simultaneously used his celebrity status to draw attention to the war effort and recruiting needs, particularly those of the Army Air Corps. As soon as he was stationed at Moffett Field outside of San Francisco, Stewart began acting as a correspondent for the Special News Service. These pieces appear to have been written by Stewart himself and take a tone more like a letter home from summer camp than a hard-hitting report from the front lines. For example, on July 13, 1941 the \textit{Washington Post} published a letter from Stewart that began with the following disclaimer:

\textsuperscript{104} 1\textsuperscript{st} Indorsement Classification Questionnaire of Reserve Officer James Maitland Stewart, December 2, 1941, signed by Captain William H. Fillmore, Air Corps Unit Instructor Official Military Personnel Files of James M. Stewart, National Archives
Jimmy Stewart, who left Hollywood stardom to enter the Army Air Corps as a private, apologized for being late with his letter about Army life, written on request of the Special News Service. He’s been so busy with things people keep telling him to do, he said he just couldn’t get around to it any sooner. Then he couldn’t find anybody to ‘type it out,’ so he had to do it in long-hand, and spelling was never one of his fortes. (His writing and spelling are O.K. – Ed.)

This introduction achieves several things. First, it reinforces Stewart’s role as an everyman by mentioning his struggles with writing this ‘letter,’ not article, because of being told what to do, not being able to find a typewriter, and having to resort to handwriting the letter, despite his concerns about his spelling. This suggests that Stewart did not have anyone else doing his work for him. Secondly, the body of the letter presents Stewart as a regular soldier and shows the struggles of other soldiers through Stewart’s experience. In his letter, Stewart goes on to also discuss his concern about the lack of availability of size 15 shoes for his brother-in-arms, Private Simpson. Stewart’s letters focused on everyday occurrences rather than tales of glory and firefights making him more relatable and mundane, while highlighting the everyday struggles of the everyman in the war.

105 Washington Post, July 13, 1941
4.5 Presenting the Benefits of Being a Pilot

Stewart also starred in the recruiting film, *Winning Your Wings*, which was produced by Warner Bros. for the United States Army Air Forces in 1942. The short opens with Lt. Stewart landing his plane on the tarmac and climbing out, looking directly into the camera with a wry grin and jokingly muttering the words, “Oh! Gee. Looks like I’m back in the movies again doesn’t it?”

![Figure 6: Jimmy Stewart in Winning Your Wings](https://readtiger.com/wkp/en/James_Stewart)

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106 *Winning Your Wings*
In *Winning Your Wings*, Stewart touches on all the main recruiting points of the day, the increase in hostilities, the need for victory, the opportunities for advancement, and the boost that the men who enlist could expect in their social lives. Admitting that this bit of his talk is not in the official ‘curriculum,’ Stewart presents a scene at a dance hall where a beautiful woman is dancing with a man in uniform, but swiftly leaves her dance partner when an Army Air Forces pilot walks in the room. "And you see the effect those shiny little wings have on a gal. It's phenomenal." 108 This part is of particular import because it suggests to the potential enlistee watching that he could share in a bit of the lifestyle that Stewart enjoys by enlisting in the Army Air Forces as well.
Though Stewart was presenting the sexual benefits that could come from being a member of the Army Air Corps the attraction that Stewart and the recruiting film represented was not an attraction to Stewart himself or to his celebrity identity. Rather, it highlighted the attraction to the shiny metal wings as an impressive sign of accomplishment. According to Stewart and the recruiting film, this sign of accomplishment and all the benefits that go with it can be transferred to any man who completes training with the Army Air Corps.

109 Winning Your Wings
http://www.quazoo.com/q/American_World_War_II_propaganda_films?alt=American_world_war_ii_propaganda_films
4.6 Media Coverage of Stewart’s Bombing Missions
Of the celebrities discussed, Jimmy Stewart was the only one literally used as a weapon in the traditional sense of the word through his service as a bomber pilot during WWII, though his service also masked the horrors of war. Much of the language in the articles introduced below make Stewart’s missions sound safe and gorgeous. Stewart’s service as a bomber pilot was widely publicized in the American media, including the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Atlanta Constitution*, and these articles always highlighted his celebrity identity and role as a movie star before presenting a veiled discussion of his activities while at war.

Captain James Stewart, former movie star who now commands the United States Liberator bomber squadron, arrived in the European theater of operations three days ago piloting an 84-engine and bomber from the last stop, over 900 miles away, it was disclosed today.

He in the group with which he trained at Sioux City, Iowa now are working day and night on the final strenuous conditioning and probably will join combat units raiding Europe soon.

Shy and taciturn, Stewart was unavailable for an interview, but his comrades describe him as eager to lead his unit in combat. As squadron commander, however, he will go on only about every fifth raid.

His comrades say Stewart never took any of his film assignments as seriously as he does his present job.

“He is about the hardest worker we ever saw,” one said, adding “he is very conscientious and thorough, and knows his plane better than do most pilots.”

Stewart, reputed to be in an A-1 pilot, has been in the Air Force about 2 1/2 years.

He is the second Hollywood star assigned to air duty in the European theater of operations and is extremely popular with the other flyers as was his predecessor,
Captain Clark Gable. Stewart will be the first actor to do regular combat flying in this area.¹¹⁰

This article, and articles like it, are important because it accomplished several things. First, it situated Stewart as a movie star first and a soldier second. This presentation made it nearly impossible for the American public to view Stewart as simply a soldier. His celebrity identity was inextricably linked to his military identity. Second, it claimed that Stewart took his role in the war effort more seriously than any film role he had been a part of. Creative careers in entertainment have been viewed as leisure activities and less serious than 9-5 jobs, however, a celebrity doing a job like being a bomber pilot during war makes the celebrity seem more serious. Finally, this article, like several that will be discussed, only sanitized facts related to Stewart’s bombing missions, providing a thin veil that masks the actual horrors of war.

¹¹⁰ Los Angeles Times, November 29, 1943
Identical wording in article in The Atlanta Constitution, November 29, 1943
Bremen was one of the targets for the early RAF 1000 bomber raids and saw several more large raids from the US 8th Air Force. As a consequence Bremen had concentrated anti-aircraft defenses, as well as concrete reinforced U-boat pens that were immune from bombing until the ‘Grand Slam’ bombs arrived towards the end of the war.

The “Grand Slam” bombs referenced were dropped by the 8th Air Force, Stewart’s unit.


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Figure 8: Image of bombing mission over Bremen in 1941.\footnote{http://ww2today.com/25-april-1945-the-royal-scots-fusiliers-enter-bremen}
Stewart’s missions were reported on in the media starting in December 1943. On December 21, 1943, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story titled “Jimmy Stewart One of Bremen Raiders: Actor Leads Squadron of Bomber Force Making Heaviest American Attack on Port.” The article stated that Stewart “led a squadron of Liberator heavy bombers over Bremen…in a heavy attack by the United States 8th Air Force,” though later clarified that his squadron was only a part of formations of heavy bombers negating the thought that Stewart and his squadron conducted a bombing run on their own.112 The image above did not accompany any coverage of Stewart’s bombing raids, but serves to show the destruction of bombing raids like the ones Stewart participated in.

The Army Air Forces released information about Stewart’s combat missions after they were completed, and Stewart’s own quotes mask the horrors of war. The *Washington Post* article that appeared after a bombing raid on Bremen in December 1943 contained quotes from Stewart that made the mission seem more like show-and-tell than active combat. “Former film star Jimmy Stewart, a captain in the eighth U.S. Air Force in Britain, participated in the bombing of the huge German port of Bremen today as pilot of the Liberator which led his squadron. Captain Stewart, who was on his second mission, said on returning: ‘there was lots of stuff up there today. The boys really had a good look at all types of enemy fighters.’”113 The focus on getting a ‘good look at all

112 *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1943
113 *The Washington Post*, December 21, 1943
types of enemy fighters’ also makes the bombing raid sound like a tour that a tourist would go on to see the sights.

Articles that did not mention Stewart’s involvement in the Bremen raid discussed the number of planes involved, the German casualties, and Allied casualties. “United States flying Fortress and Liberators, aided by American and Allied fighters, plastered the north west German port and U-boat center of Bremen with explosives and incendiaries in daylight today, shooting down 42 German fighters at a cost of 25 bombers and eight fighters.”

After the March 14, 1944 raid on Brunswick, the following article ran in The Washington Post.

Major James Stewart returned to his base today after leading all Liberators on the Brunswick raid and said, smiling, “it was all right.” Asked if he saw any German planes; the former Hollywood star, replied, “not one.”

The ship ran into some anti-aircraft fire over the target in around the coast of Holland, but “our fighter escort is the best I’ve ever seen.”

“I’ve never seen so many P-38’s.” He said. “You could see contrails [condensation trails] from them and the P-47s for miles.”

It was the first time Stewart had commanded such a big flight of four-engine bombers and his fellow airman pointed out that his selection for the job was recognition of his flying ability.

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On a previous raid Stewart, as squadron commander, led a group of 20 or more Liberators.

Today’s was his tenth mission, earning in Oakleaf cluster for the air metal received after five missions.

Stuart has been to some of the toughest targets in the European theater of war including Keil, Bremen, Ludwigshafen, the Gilze-Rijen airfields, Fuerth, Pas-de-Calais, Brunswick and Frankfurt.\textsuperscript{115}

Though this article does mention coming under enemy anti-aircraft fire, this reality of war was quickly masked by focusing on the quality of the escort fighters and the number of contrails in the sky. The article closes with a list of sights that Stewart has seen from the air, in a similar way as a tourist, like the preceding article.

This was surpassed by the article that ran in \textit{The Christian Science Monitor} on April 14, 1944, which read: “Major Jimmy Stewart, former film star, lead one group of Liberators over Obetzoffenhofen yesterday, traveling in the lead plane as co-pilot. It was the first time Major Stewart had flown since he became operations officer for the group several weeks ago. Yesterday’s trip was without any special incident.”\textsuperscript{116} Yes, the article clearly refers to the bombing raid and air combat overall as both ‘traveling’ and a ‘trip.’

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{The Washington Post}, March 16, 1944
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{The Christian Science Monitor}, April 14, 1944
Figure 9: Locations and dates of Jimmy Stewart’s bombing raids\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} Card from the Official Military Personnel Files of James M. Stewart showing the locations and dates of the bombing raids that Stewart took part in during WWII
Staged photos of Stewart circulated during his service also contributed to masking the horrors of war. The most famous of these is a photo of Stewart and fellow Hollywood actor and Army Air Force pilot, Clark Gable.
This photo denies the reality of war faced by so many soldiers during WWII. The actors leisurely chat on a couch on RAF Polebrook, an airbase in England. Both men are at ease.

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and smiling. In fact, this photo looks like it could have been taken backstage on the MGM lot. The only reminder that a war is occurring is their uniforms; however, at a casual glance, those could be explained away as merely costumes for an upcoming film.

Other photos of Stewart showed him carrying out his command role and greeting and debriefing flight crews as they returned from bombing raids. The image below shows Stewart with the crew of the plane “Male Call” after the crew returned from a bombing mission. The image is classic and calls to mind many others from WWI, WWII, and the years following that feature pilots and crew posed in front of their planes, showing off, posturing, and performing romanticized militarization.
Figure 11: Major Stewart and bomber crew in front of ‘Male Call’

119 [link]
Photo of Major Stewart and bomber crew in front of ‘Male Call,’ a B-24 Liberator just returned from a raid. From the American Air Museum in Britain’s Roger Freeman Collection

“Hollywood Actor Jimmy Stewart (Major James Stewart), Operations Officer of the 453rd Bomb Group, with bomber crew who and a B-24 Liberator (serial number 42-52154) nicknamed "Male Call". Image stamped on reverse: 'Associated Press.' [stamp], 'Passed for publication 10 Apr 1944.' [stamp] and '315152.' [Censor no.] Printed caption on reverse: 'JIMMY STEWART- NOW OPERATIONS OFFICER. Major James M Stewart (Film star Jimmy Stewart) who has been on eleven raids over enemy territory- including one over Berlin when he led his Liberator Group- has now been appointed operations officer at the Liberator base at which he is stationed "somewhere in England". Associated Press Photo Shows: S/Sgt Keith M Dibble of Rixford, PA, Gunner, L/Lt Roger Counselman of Meadville, PA, Pilot, Major James M Stewart of Indiana, Pennsylvania, Operations Officer, S/Sgt Joseph T Fiorentino of Philadelphia, PA, gunner and 2/Lt AE Wilensky of Monessen, PA, Navigator. Major Stewart meets members of the crew “Male Call” on their return from a raid.” [link]
The masking of the horrors of war is particularly evident in Stewart’s homecoming, featured in the September 24, 1945 issue of *Life Magazine*. The images and the article presented Stewart as the hometown hero and showed him visiting key spots in town, including his family’s hardware store, but only mentioned a sanitized version of his service. The feature focuses on Stewart the soldier, but Stewart the celebrity is never far behind and the setting in his hometown only reinforces his celebrity identity.

![Image of Stewart entertaining children in his family’s hardware store during his Homecoming.](image)

**Figure 12: Life Magazine**

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120 *Life Magazine* September 24, 1945
Stewart entertaining children in his family’s hardware store during his Homecoming. *Life Magazine* reported that Stewart made these puppets when he was a child.
Finally, the only reason that the feature saw the light of day was the personality that made Stewart a bankable Hollywood asset, as shown in the images.

4.8 Stewart Masking the Horrors of War

In summation, the militarization of Jimmy Stewart masked the horrors of war in the following ways: first, it granted the media the opportunity to focus on and glorify adventure tropes attached to flying aircraft in propaganda pieces starring Stewart, as was seen in recruiting pieces like *Winning Your Wings*. Second, the media was able to focus on Stewart’s celebrity identity and use words and phrases to discuss Stewart’s bombing raids in carefully crafted ways that ignored the reality of combat by continually downplaying the danger and violence of bombing raids, making bombing missions sound like tourist activities. Finally, the media’s use of staged pictures, particularly of Stewart’s homecoming, glossed over the realities of war, like the ones released by the Army while Stewart was in active duty service and in *Life Magazine’s* Homecoming feature.
Chapter 5 - Joe Louis

“He's a credit to his race—the human race.”

Jimmy Cannon

5.1 Argument

On January 10, 1942, the day following his bout with Buddy Baer which raised $47,000 for the Navy Relief Society, Joe Louis Barrow marched into a recruiting office and volunteered for combat. He promptly enlisted, but not for combat. Louis became a soldier in the Army’s Special Services Division. According to Lauren Rebecca Skarloff, Louis’s service was a powerful tool that the military and the government used to send the message of the declining racial divide. In one respect, Skarloff is correct. Joe Louis was a powerful tool that may have been used to suggest that racial differences in the service were eroding.

However, this dissertation argues that Louis’s service was also a control mechanism for other Black males by presenting an image of the ideal Black male and his role in the war effort as a fighter. The militarization of Joe Louis, beginning with his

122 Skarloff
contributions to the war effort before joining the active duty ranks, masks the horrors of war in the following ways: 1) by presenting military service as entertainment through Louis’s service in the Special Services Division, 2) by presenting photos that suggested an idealized version of military service, and 3) by presenting performed, controlled, sanitized violence through Louis’s boxing bouts and images of Louis with military machinery.

Joe Louis Barrow (known professionally as Joe Louis) was the first African American Heavyweight Champion of the World and is best known for knocking out German boxer, Max Schmeling, in the years leading up to WWII. Throughout his career Joe Louis became a symbol of Black America, seen most in his fight with Primo Carnera, and a symbol of American might, seen in his second fight with Schmeling.

Though even as a symbol of America, he was still viewed as a Black man first and an American second. He was the son of sharecroppers and his success was viewed as proof of the achievability of the American Dream. However, this success and his public image were carefully constructed by his management team. Louis through his military service, which focused on boxing tours, recruiting films, and other public affairs material, both served to control Louis as a powerful strong Black male and to transfer Louis’s power to the military.

5.2 Constructing Joe Louis’s Public Identity
When discussing the construction of Louis’s public identity, he cannot be separated from his race. One example of this is his nickname: The Brown Bomber. Still evoked
today and even appearing on his headstone in Arlington National Cemetery\textsuperscript{123}, this nickname is rife with racism because it directly rests on the color of his skin and suggests that Louis’s race, being referred to in the first word of his nickname, held at least as much importance than his skill as a boxer. The image of Joe Louis as a boxer and his boxing nickname even appear on his tombstone at Arlington National Cemetery, which is fitting since he served as a boxer.

\textsuperscript{123} Both Louis’s internment at Arlington and his headstone required special permission from the Department of Defense.
Simply calling him ‘The Bomber’ would have negated the racism inherent in his nickname by not addressing his race at all. Louis was inextricably tied to his race and to the Black boxers that came before him. His public identity was constructed in direct contrast to the characteristics and behavior that had been problematic for celebrities like

124 http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/boxing/2006-04-12-louis-anniversary_x.htm
Jack Johnson. African American professional tennis player, Arthur Ashe said about Johnson’s impact, that:

Nothing that Fredrick Douglass did, nothing that Booker T. Washington did, nothing that any African-American had done up until that time had the same impact as Jack Johnson’s fight against Jim Jeffries on July 4, 1910. It was the most awaited event in the history of African-Americans to that date. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was not done with widespread prior knowledge. Half of black America didn’t know it was going to be issued, and even after it was, many African-Americans didn’t know about it for weeks. But virtually every black American knew that Johnson versus Jeffries was going to take place. They knew it; they knew what was at stake; and they also knew they could get the results almost immediately because of the advent of the telegraph. And when Johnson won [...] it completely destroyed one of the crucial pillars of white supremacy—the idea that the white man was superior in body and mind to all the darker peoples of the earth. That was just not true as far as anybody was concerned anymore, because now a black man held the title symbolic of the world’s most physically powerful human being. It had an emotional immediacy that went beyond what Ali, Joe Louis, or even Jackie Robinson did, because it was the first time that anything like that had ever happened.  

Johnson was known for his brash fighting style, taunting his opponents, and, most shocking for the time, dating White women. Johnson was a flashy fighter who flaunted his success and lived a lifestyle that many White Americans found distasteful for a Black man to lead. In the Jim Crow south, there were strict laws that prohibited relationships between white women and Black men. Though Jim Crow laws only applied to the southern United States, there was still prevailing racism and opinions regarding how an

125 Johnson & Rivers, 2007 pg. vii
African American should act. These laws and the prevailing racism that they highlighted was not only experienced by Louis, but also by every black person in the south.

Black boxers, even those who towed the line and lived according to the rules and expectations set by White America, also upset already unstable racial tensions. "The triumphs of black boxers were especially unsettling to whites because to them those triumphs disrupted the natural social order and challenged the belief in their own racial superiority and true manhood. This fact led to the search for ‘white hopes’, which meant finding boxers who could confirm white America’s belief in racial superiority by triumphing over black boxers in the squared circle."¹²⁶ Jack Johnson particularly upset racial tensions and directly called into question the idea of white superiority and, as was the case with his fight against James Jeffries, who was dubbed “The Great White Hope,” knocked it out.¹²⁷ "Johnson deflated white supremacy. Yet his fight Jeffries unleashed some of the worst elements of racism. His one-sided triumph [against Jeffries, billed as “The Fight of the Century,”] on July 4[, 1910] ignited riots in Houston and Fort Worth, Texas."¹²⁸ This defeat, though only the defeat of one athlete who came out of a six-year retirement to face Johnson, was viewed as a loss not just for Jeffries, but also for White America and reverberated around the world.¹²⁹ White fighters began avoiding bouts with

¹²⁶ Wiggins pg. 185
¹²⁷ Though Johnson’s victory was only a technical knockout because it was stopped by Jeffries’ manager to keep Johnson from inflicting more damage on his fighter.
¹²⁸ Dorinson pg. 117
¹²⁹ Runstedtler pg. 72-78
black fighters, “especially in the heavyweight division, which was imbued with far more racial meaning than the lighter divisions because of the size of the fighters.”\textsuperscript{130}

However, it was not just Johnson’s performance in the ring that was threatening to White America. Johnson was also known for being brash outside of the ring. Though he certainly had the talent to back it up, he was boastful and often belittled competitors. He lived a lavish lifestyle that rivaled some of the richest Whites. He also openly dated White women. Jack Johnson was convicted under the Mann Act in relationship to his courting white women and fled to France.\textsuperscript{131} The Mann Act, also known as the White-Slave Traffic Act, was a federal law making it illegal to transport “any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose” across state lines.\textsuperscript{132} For this he was sentenced to one year and one day in jail. Further speaking to his dual role in American history, as recently as 2013, members of Congress unsuccessfully attempted to have this conviction overturned in recognition of his contributions to American history and boxing. Perhaps W. E. B. DuBois put it best, “[t]he reason Jack Johnson was so beset by his own country, a country ironically which had only recently reaffirmed that all men were created equal, was because of his Unforgivable Blackness.”\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130} Wiggins pg. 185
\textsuperscript{131} Ward pg.345-350
\textsuperscript{132} Mann Act 1910
\textsuperscript{133} DuBois “The Crisis” (August 1914)
Expectations of identity are constructed by those who are in power, and deviation from those expectations is punished by those who are in power. In the case of Joe Louis and Jack Johnson, the expectations of their identities were dictated not by the Black America, but by white America. Black men were supposed to know their place in society, below White men, even below White women. Black men were supposed to excel at physical labor. The personal and behavioral expectations set forth by Louis’s managers were not just created by them but were in line with what was expected by white America.

Louis’s managers were well-aware of Johnson’s legacy when they began constructing Louis’s identity. “Unlike Johnson, Louis played the humble hero and personified the accommodationist leader. He did not pursue white women – at least not openly…A model of discretion, Louis neither bragged nor taunted. All he said in response to critics who thought Billy Conn too fast for the ‘Brown Bomber’ was: ‘He can run, but he can’t hide.’ His fists did the talking.” Louis’s fighting style has been described as heavy hitting but also “as elegant as the finest of ballet dancers.” Joe Louis’s celebrity persona was constructed as a hard-working, humble, Black man who was pleased, but not too pleased, with his victories, and, more than anything, thankful for the opportunities afforded him. Louis was a physical representation of the American Dream. He was living proof that, with hard work, a man, even a Black man living in a

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134 Dorinson pg. 119
135 Early pg. 107
racist country, could achieve more than his parents did in America. “The official construction of Joe Louis involved a depoliticization of the Brown Bomber as he became the quintessential symbol of Americanness; Louis was overtly disconnected from charged racial issues, instead representing black patriotism and black citizenship.”

His differences from Jack Johnson and contributions to race issues in the United States were even heralded in African American newspapers, like the Atlanta Daily World News whose journalist, Lucius “Melancholy” Jones wrote in his ‘Slats on Sports’ column that “Joe Louis’ Contribution Belongs in [the] Field of Sociology”:

The hot, humid afternoon of July 4, 1910…because Jack Johnson, the black skinned man, had knocked out Jim Jeffries, the white man, in the fifteenth round to become the first Negro heavyweight champion of the world, at least ten people were killed and hundreds painfully injured in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Atlanta, St. Louis, Little Rock, Houston.

... The terror of race riot was upon the land for days and caused sporadic disturbances in eleven cities. Feeling was so intense that governors of several states prohibited showing of motion pictures of the Johnson-Jeffries fight weeks later in the fear the fire of intolerance would flame again. And at least ten people lay in their graves because one black man had knocked one white man into insensibility with his fists.

Consequently, it was with some apprehension that authorities watched the stage set for the heavyweight championship fight between Jimmy Braddock and Joe Louis June 23, 1937 in Comiskey Park on Chicago’s Southside...

Comiskey Park is surrounded by a small army of police this night, because time is short but men’s memory is long.

136 Skarloff pg. 959
Louis wins the fight in the eighth round.

Nothing has ever happened after one of Joe Louis’ fights with a white man. In 1910, innocent bystanders died because a black man defeated a white man. In 1937 another black man defeated another white man – and a far more sympathetic figure than Jefferies ever was – and the only damage was upon the PURSES of those who wagered a few bob, purely for sentimental reasons, on Braddock.

…

Had Joe Louis not turned out to be as exemplary a young man as he happens to be, it is just possible that, during his regime as world heavyweight champion, he may have proved a throwback to the era of 1910 race riots were imminent in eleven major cities of the country following a mixed title bout.\(^{137}\)

Jones’s piece is important because it acknowledges the differences between Johnson and Louis, and highlights the acts of violence seen after some Johnson bouts, versus the lack of violence that followed the Louis bouts. More importantly, however, it draws attention to the fact that, in spite of security precautions being taken, violence did not follow Louis’ bouts. Notably, however, Louis and his managers took steps to distance his image from Johnson’s.

Louis and his management team were conscious of the trouble Black boxers had faced in the past, especially Jack Johnson, and were intent on presenting Louis as the ‘exemplary young man that he happens to be.’ Because of this desire, Louis and his

\(^{137}\) *Atlanta Daily World News*, June 12, 1940
managers created and adhered to a strict set of rules called the "Seven Commandments," that guided Louis’s personal conduct. These included:

1. He was never to have his picture taken along with a white woman.  
2. He would never go into a nightclub alone.  
3. There would be no soft fights.  
4. There would be no fixed fights.  
5. He was never to gloat over a fallen opponent.  
6. He was to keep a ‘dead pan’ in front of cameras.  
7. He was to live and fight clean.

He and his managers acknowledged his part in the legacy of Black boxers and intentionally created his public and private persona in direct contrast to that of former Black boxing great, Jack Johnson who insisted “on living life on his own terms and [his] refusal to acquiesce to the white power structure.” Louis’s subsequent voluntary military service furthered the image that he and his managers strove to present.

5.3 Joe Louis and the Black Male Body

To slave-owning White males, Black bodies represented a commodity that could be used to complete arduous tasks. According to Ronald L. Jackson, II, “They were property or possessions whose foreign and physical bodies were literally considered tools

138 JL was not allowed to have his picture taken with white women, only white woman he was ever photographed with was a student who interviewed him for her school paper.
139 Skarloff pg. 970, Mead pg. 52
140 Wiggins pg. 185
for labor and procreation that were evacuated of thought and culture. It was particularly unimportant whether they could think beyond accomplishing a series of menial tasks demanded of them.”  

Viewing Black bodies as being devoid of purpose aside from carrying out physical labor negates the recognition of the Black man as being a human being and relegates him to the role of beast of burden. The sale and purchase of slaves was dependent upon two characteristics: the slave’s character and physicality.

Black male muscles were particularly threatening to White slave owners and, by extension, White America. “As an external signifier of masculinity, the body has come to represent all the conventions traditionally linked to assumptions of male superiority. ‘Of course,’ Susan Bordo has observed in her discussion of contemporary body images, ‘muscles have chiefly symbolized and continue to symbolize masculine power as physical strength, frequently operating as a means of coding the ‘naturalness’ of sexual difference.’ The muscular body is a heavily inscribed sign: Nothing else so clearly marks an individual as a bearer of masculine power.” 

This masculine power was threatening to White slave owners who created a world where they reigned supreme because it questioned the social order that Whites had created. However, once purchased Black masculine power transferred to the White slave owner along with the threat it presented and its ability to do work and damage. “[T]he black man has been subjected to

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141 Jackson pg. 14  
142 Bordo pg. 193  
143 Brown pg. 27
the burden of racial stereotype that place him in the symbolic space of being too hard, too physical, too bodily. Ironically, much of the tension regarding the hypermasculine stereotype of black men is a logical cultural development for a group systematically denied full access to the socially constructed ideals of masculinity.\(^{144}\)

According to Jeffrey Brown, “[t]he history of black male paradox – emasculated, but at the same time feared – is grounded in a long tradition of subjugation and resistance.”\(^{145}\) bell hooks furthers this thought by describing “the black man’s cultivation and embrace of a hypermasculine image as a logical response to antebellum and postbellum views held by white supremacists, which characterized black men [as] feminine, a rhetoric that ‘insisted on depicting the black male as symbolically castrated, a female eunuch.’\(^{146}\) Developing large muscles, something that women’s bodies are less able to do, is a visual way of reminding the White community that a Black male slave is, in spite of how he is viewed, still a man, and a strong man no less.

While being extremely desirable to White slave owners, the strong Black male body was also perceived as a very real threat. “[E]ven though he wanted Black bodies that were large, strong brutes to toil the land and plant crops and wanted slaves who could resist all kinds of inclement weather, those individuals were the ones he feared the most, insofar as they were potentially more dangerous.”\(^{147}\) Strong Black male bodies

\(^{144}\) Brown pg. 28
\(^{145}\) Brown pg. 29
\(^{146}\) Brown pg. 29 and hooks in Golden pg. 20
\(^{147}\) Jackson pg. 16
presented a potential physical and sexual threat that exposed the underlying instability of the power structure of slavery in the United States. This power structure existed and was highlighted in Jim Crow Laws and, to some extent, still exists today.

Jackson argues that it is too reductive to simply blame fear for the way Black male bodies as a group have been scripted. He argues that it is also necessary to see the scripting of Black male bodies as more than an individual phenomenon. According to Jackson, “Black corporeal inscriptions are infused iterations of whiteness ideology embodied as Black corporeal objects, but complicated by the irregularities subsumed in a profound matrix of desire and control. So, it is not simply that there are personal and social influences on bodily inscriptions, but that the personal is the social.”

Whiteness ideology constructs and perpetuates stereotypes and applies these stereotypes not only on bodies as a group but, more importantly, on individual bodies. This allows for Black males to be divided into groups and, if White behavioral expectations are met, certain Black males to be viewed as more or less socially desirable. This is particularly true of the Black male boxer.

Within this world of control and fear of punishment, some slaves were allowed a modicum of a “sense of independence, some degree of control over their own lives, an opportunity to satisfy their competitive impulses and a chance to exhibit their unique style of physical movement and gift for improvisation.” Controlled sporting events,
like boxing, provided entertainment for Whites, allowing Black slaves to show off the power of their muscles and the power that could be delivered through their physical strength in an environment controlled by Whites, while also showing off the power of these Black bodies that was transferred to their White owners. “[T]hese organized fighting activities provided enslaved men with a vital and meaningful context in which to assert and display autonomous masculine identity distinct from both enslaved women and slaveholders on the plantations of the antebellum South.”\(^{150}\) According to Wiggins, “[s]ome of the more physically gifted, trustworthy and perhaps even more malleable slaves were involved in the sporting life of the planter…Evidence makes clear that these slaves were different from the ordinary field hands and even house slaves, because they often had more freedom of movement, special privileges and closer relationships with their owners.”\(^{151}\) These relationships and privileges, however, were still controlled by the expected behavior dictated by White slave owners. Sport was a way for Black men to differentiate themselves during slavery and there is a clear carryover of this idea in the decades after slavery, but the hyper-masculinity that many successful athletes display is feared even as fans cheer.

Masculinity, particularly the type of hyper-masculinity based on the extremely developed physicality represented by athletes, has long been considered a threat. Boxing, a sport that deals with inflicting physical violence in a spectator, albeit somewhat

\(^{150}\) Lussana pg. 904  
\(^{151}\) Wiggins pg. 182
controlled, environment, takes the concern of the danger of hyper-masculinity and its physicality further. The entire purpose of the sport is to inflict bodily harm to another equally hyper-masculine individual. If an athlete can inflict this damage on someone who is equally as fit and muscled, it can be suggested that the athlete may be even more of a perceived threat to average individuals, such as White slave owners.

Sport was used as a form of control and entertainment but, with the abolishment of slavery, sport took on a new meaning in the Black community. “Professional sports [became] a location where many black males received their first education for critical consciousness about the politics of race and black male bodies. Playing professional sports was a primary work arena for black men to both assert patriarchal manhood or a humanist-based selfhood and make money.”152 This route allowed the possibility of a flourishing career built upon the hyper-masculinity that that was so feared and, in some very real ways, still is. Joe Louis built his career within the allowed confines of boxing.

5.4 The Boxer

Two powerful examples of Louis’s role as a symbol of Black America prior to his military service come from Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. In his autobiography, Hughes recounts that “[e]ach time Joe Louis won a fight in those depression years, even before he became champion, thousands of black Americans on relief or W.P.A., and poor, would throng out into the streets all across the land to march and cheer and yell and

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152 hooks pg. 21
cry because of Joe’s one-man triumphs. No one else in the United States has ever had such an effect on Negro emotions—or on mine. I marched and cheered and yelled and cried, too.”¹⁵³ This response to Louis was echoed by Angelou, but she also expressed the importance of Louis’s victories or losses to the average Black American. Louis was a symbol for and hero of Black Americans. Black American’s could recognize themselves in Louis.

Angelou echoes this in her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, but also offers a moving illustration of Louis’s impact on the Black community in her autobiography. In it, the Black community gathers in the local store to listen to Joe Louis’s June 25, 1935 match against Italian boxer Primo Carnera. Angelou gives the reader a play-by-play of the reactions of the crowd when Louis was winning and when it looked like he was about to fall. “My race groaned. It was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A Black boy whipped and maimed. It was hounds on the trail of a man running through slimy swamps. It was a white woman slapping her maid for being forgetful...If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help.”¹⁵⁴ This fight was pivotal for Louis. Louis was at a disadvantage against 6’ 6” Carnera’s 85” reach, as Louis measured 6’ 2” with a 76” reach. There was also a real sense of danger. In

¹⁵³ Hughes & McLaren pg. 301
¹⁵⁴ Angelou pg. 135
February 1933, Carnera’s opponent, Ernie Schaaf, died three days after being knocked out by Carnera.

Figure 14: David & Goliath

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155 Carnera was so much taller than Louis that Louis had to stand on a suitcase for this photo. 
When Louis wins the fight, the store erupts in cheers. “Champion of the world. A Black boy. Some Black mother’s son. He was the strongest man in the world. People drank Coca-Cola like ambrosia and ate candy bars like Christmas….It would take an hour or more before the people would leave the Store and head home. Those who lived too far had made arrangements to stay in town. It wouldn’t do for a Black man and his family to be caught on a lonely country road on a night when Joe Louis proved that we were the strongest people in the world.”¹⁵⁶ Angelou knew, even as a child and more so as an adult reflecting on her childhood, that Louis and his victories reflected on Black Americans as a whole. His victories had the power to inspire Black men and women to strive for more than their current situations allowed for. According to Charlene Regester, “[Louis’s] victories allowed black spectators to see Louis’s power as their own…. [Additionally,] black male spectators who were gazing at black athletes could identify with the symbolic power these athletes possessed to ‘repudiate’ or repel the racism projected onto them as black males.”¹⁵⁷ However, these victories also drew attention to the strength of their race. This strength was dangerous because it once again called White superiority into question, and because of this danger, Louis and his image had to be created and managed carefully.

Louis could be a powerful Black man only as long as he played by the rules set by White America. As such, the rules laid out by his managers fell in line with many of White America’s expectations. Louis’s public celebrity persona became his product,

¹⁵⁶ Angelou pg. 136  
¹⁵⁷ Regester in Ritchie pg. 282-283
though this, too, was complicated by race, though not solely by Louis’s race but by the race of his fans. “Joe Louis is a product of American popular culture, a creation of it, in effect, and therefore [he] is nothing more than the convenient bread-and-circus invention of white American capitalists; Joe Louis, however, is a hero of the black masses, a potential source of political mobilization because he can so deeply excite so many blacks.” White capitalists, and Louis’s Black managers, understood both sides of this power construct and strove to market Louis in a way that would be received positively by both White and Black fans. Louis, in turn, became commodified.

In the 1930’s Nash-Underwood Inc. produced jars for their Nash’s Prepared Mustard in the likeness of Joe Louis called the “Lucky Joe” Bank. The product included instructions to clean out the empty jar and lid and use it as a bank after the mustard had been consumed. This product reflected both on the economic hardship of the times during which it was created and Joe Louis’s public persona.

158 Early pg. 112
Figure 15: The “Lucky Joe” Bank
The purpose of a bank, saving money, conserving resources, and, in another sense, displaying the physical manifestation of hard work, aligned with Louis’s public celebrity persona. It encouraged its user to save money in the hopes of acquiring wealth of their own. It served as a simple symbol of the American dream— the dream that Louis symbolized to Black Americans. However, despite these positive messages, the bank was still steeped in the racism of the time.

The bank was intended to resemble Louis’s face, though the bank itself looks nothing like Louis, but does bear a strong resemblance to the Sambo cartoons of the time with an over-exaggerated nose and large bright red lips. The Sambo stereotype of the happy slave makes chilling sense when used in connection with Louis. As discussed, Louis was better behaved in the eyes of White America than Jack Johnson had been, and it was this good behavior that allowed for Louis’s success in spite of racism. One of the foundations of Louis’s public celebrity persona was patriotism and it was this patriotism that was at the root of Louis’s voluntary military service.

Joe Louis came to prominence in the years leading up to WWII. Tensions between the United States and Germany were high during this time and Louis’s two bouts against German boxer, Max Schmeling, were subject to international attention. In his first match against Schmeling on June 18, 1936, Louis summarily lost. The Nazi Party claimed Schmeling’s victory as definitive proof of the superiority of the Aryan Übermensch. Additionally, Schmeling’s victory was viewed as a decisive German political victory over the United States.
Louis vowed that his defeat, his first professional loss and one of only three losses in his career, would not be repeated. His second match against Schmeling, on June 22, 1938, was appropriately brief; Louis knocked Schmeling out in the first round. Louis’s victory was a symbolic victory for the United States against an enemy that was becoming an ever-looming threat.159 As has been pointed out time and time again, ironically, this victory was claimed by a Black male who still did not have equal rights in many states.

5.5 African American Newspapers’ Coverage of Louis
Prior to his draft and induction, Louis was militarized through his public support of the Armed Forces. Military imagery was introduced to his celebrity identity and circulated by the Armed Forces, the media, and Louis’s managers. On August 8, 1940, Louis appeared at Fort Hamilton after being “signed by Major Smyser, a recreation officer at Brooklyn Army Reservation, to be the guest referee at the boxing show[.].”160 While at Fort Hamilton, Louis got a brief view of Army life, including being shown how to use a rifle.

159 Following his defeat, Schmeling was shunned by the Nazi Party and was later drafted and served in the Luftwaffe. Schmeling and Louis became friends after WWII and Schmeling even paid for Louis’s military funeral at Arlington National Cemetery in 1981.
160 New York Amsterdam News, August 3, 1940
JOE IS WILLING TO FIGHT, AND HOW!

Figure 16: Private Vernon W. Boyette shows Joe Louis a rifle at Fort Hamilton, NY.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ The Chicago Defender, August 10, 1940
The same image also appeared in the Philadelphia Tribune, August 8, 1940 and the New Journal and Guide, August 10, 1940
Portions of Ralph McGill’s August 6, 1940 Atlanta Constitution article were directly quoted in Lucius ‘Melancholy’ Jones’s August 7, 1940 ‘Slants’ on Sports column in the Atlanta Daily World.

"Yesterday I saw a picture of Joe Louis, the world’s heavyweight champion. It was taken at Fort Hamilton, N.Y. Joe Louis was being shown a rifle by one of the men in training.

In the cut-line it was said that talk turned to conscription and Joe Louis was asked about the army.

‘Me fight? I’d do anything for this country,’ he said. ‘Look what this country did for me.’

“I’d never be a traitor to my country. Look what this country did for me. It gave me a chance to win the heavyweight title…And I’ve tried to prove myself worthy of it. Uncle Sam can certainly depend upon me to do my part for my country if any foreign army tries to invade it. Because I’m grateful.”
This staged image shows an Army Private showing Louis one of the base rifles.

Everything about the image is safe, from the Private still having his hand on the rifle, to Louis gingerly holding the rifle, to the soldier observing in the background. The image is important because it makes war preparations look enjoyable, safe and controlled.

He also got ‘his first taste of Army life’ in October 1941. Photos of Louis being woken up by a bugle call and lining up for chow in the mess hall appeared in newspapers. These images played into narratives attached to the military at the time, like being woken up by reveille which was a popular theme during WWII thanks to the Andrews Sisters’ hit “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” that was released in 1941, and the chow in the Army mess hall. Like the image of Louis being taught to use a rifle shown above, the image below shows a staged and idealized version of what military service is like.
When questioned by newspapers about if he would serve, Louis said, “This is the best country I know of...And I’d gladly fight to defend it. Every colored man I’ve ever known has been 100 percent American and I’ll always be loyal to my country and to my race. I’d never let either down.”\textsuperscript{163} The \textit{Pittsburgh Courier} article also claimed that these sentiments were held by 12 million other African Americans.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{New Journal and Guide}, October 18, 1941
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{The Pittsburgh Courier}, August 24, 1940
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{The Pittsburgh Courier}, August 24, 1940
Articles like this clearly draw comparisons between Louis and the general African American population. “All my people stick by America. Even in the South where they are pretty tough on my race, sometimes, they’re still loyal to America. They respect the Federal government and its flag and they have always been willing to fight for Uncle Sam just like they did in the last World War. And when they need men to protect our homes and families, colored men are always among the first to answer the call.”¹⁶⁵

However, Louis’s patriotism was not without its detractors. Prior to volunteering for military service, Louis participated in benefit bouts for the services, including the U.S. Navy on January 9, 1942. Almost immediately after the benefit bout was announced there was an overwhelming outcry. The New Journal Guide reported that “[s]entiment is all against the Navy and even Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis has not been spared of censure in the discussion hereabouts as to whether the Brown Bomber should go through with his contract to box Buddy Baer in Madison Square Garden on January 9 for the benefit of the New York Auxiliary of the U.S. Navy Relief Society.”¹⁶⁶ Criticism of Louis’s decision to participate in the bout stemmed from the treatment of Black men seeking to enlist and serve in the Navy. Randy Roberts addressed the oblique racism voiced by military officials.

¹⁶⁵ The Pittsburgh Courier, August 24, 1940
¹⁶⁶ New Journal and Guide, November 22, 1941
For many white sailors and officers [the meager] percentage [of Blacks in the Navy] was still too high. It was 0 percent in the Marines, prompting Marine Commandant General Thomas Holcomb to say, ‘If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites.’ Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox felt basically the same. Toward the end of 1940, in a meeting with President Roosevelt and a group of civil rights leaders, Knox asserted that he would resign his once rather than integrate the Navy. Southern whites would simply not tolerate such a measure. In 1941 he rearmed the point, arguing that ‘men live in such intimacy aboard ship that we simply can’t enlist Negroes above the rank of messman.’ A Navy board appointed to look into the matter agreed with Knox: ‘Enlistment of Negroes for general service would immediately create a situation which would destroy internally the efficiency of the Navy.’

Louis’s potential role in the Navy did not escape Dan Burley of the New York Amsterdam Star-News. He began by acknowledging that his criticism of Louis’s support of the war effort was not popular, calling the whole issue ‘dynamite,’ but clarified that the treatment of Black sailors was problematic, no matter how popular the war effort was.

Roberts pg. 208

Louis later addressed the realities faced by Black servicemen: “I really got a chance to look at a lot of those black G.I.’s. Some of them were just little kids who had lied about their ages. They needed to be home with their momma, if they had one. For some of these guys, this was the best they’d ever lived. Three square meals a day, a bed of their own – everything neat and clean. Then there was the common enemy – Nazi Germany. All those guys could relate to that. Wasn’t a black man there who didn’t understand what the Jews were going through. Somehow, they would place their own lives into what was happening over there, and a lot of them, for real, wanted to get to Hitler.

Mershon and Schlossman pg. 48

Then you turn the coin over. Here at all these ‘niggers’ ready and willing to go out and try and kill Hitler, and maybe get themselves killed, but they can’t sleep in the same barracks with the white guys or go to the same movies or hardly get in officer’s training. Made me start thinking.”

Louis, Rust, & Rust Jr. pg. 175
This is dynamite, but I’ve handled newspaper dynamite before and although my fingers have been occasionally scorched, I am willing to pick up another stick, providing that in so doing it helps clarify our thinking and our attitude on what is right and what is wrong. And in this case, I think Joe Louis is dead wrong in defending his title bout for the Jim Crow U.S. Navy from which he will receive no purse.\textsuperscript{168}

Burley continued:

\textit{In Navy, Louis Would Shine Shoes, Wait Table Like Rest of Negro Sailors}

Louis, in spite of the fact that his is the biggest name in sports, couldn’t do that. His fate would be the same as that of countless other Negroes who have joined or tried to join the Navy: a bootblack, a cook, a dishwasher, a lackey, a plain ordinary flunky in the mess hall, anything that has to do with manual labor \textsc{below deck}.

He wouldn’t get the first closeup view of a big gun in action. They might allow him to polish one of the big cannon while the ship was in dry dock; but in action it would mean the brig and bread and water if he put his hands on weapons reserved for the use of whites only.

…

The champion has been matched with Buddy Baer for a 15-round return title bout at Madison Square Garden, Jan. 8. Louis thus will become the first holder of the heavyweight title in the history of boxing to put his crown on the line and get nothing in return. Laudable? On the surface, yes. Underneath the surface? No. Mike Jacobs will promote the bout, according to Rear Admiral Adolphus Andrews, Commandant of the Third Auxiliary of the Navy Relief Society. Mike Jacobs will get nothing for promoting the fight, but Baer will get a percentage of the net gate, the usual challenger’s percentage which in the past has ranged from 12 ½ to 20 percent.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{New York Amsterdam Star-News}, November 22, 1941
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{New York Amsterdam Star-News}, November 22, 1941
In response, Louis maintained that he was aware of the Navy’s history and the treatment of Black enlistees and sailors, but would still participate in the benefit in the hope that it could do some good. “Louis, in explaining why he had chosen to aid the Navy said he believed that in the long run Negros would benefit from his gesture. ‘Already the boys in the Navy on the west coast are beginning to get a favorable reaction from their superior officers,’ the champion declared. ‘They told me that ever since it was learned that the Navy Relief Society was to reap cash receipts of my fight, the whole attitude toward the Negro sailor has changed.’”

Louis responded to the controversy in *The Chicago Defender* by saying, “I have no apologies to offer for what I am doing for the United States Navy. I know very well what I am doing. I know there’s discrimination against people in the navy, but I believe this is the most effective method to fight it.”

In this instance, rather than a knock-out, Louis chose to fight hate with kindness.

In response to criticism that Louis should not fight a fundraising exhibition bout for the Navy because of the Navy’s treatment of Black enlistees and sailors, *The Pittsburgh Courier*’s Joseph D. Bibb claimed that:

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170 *The Chicago Defender*, December 6, 1941
171 *The Chicago Defender*, December 6, 1941
[Louis] is demonstrating broadness of vision and kindness in nature. He is breaking down barriers and moulding [sic] opinion that will seep into the hearts of American people. Louis is proving himself to be both the exponent and coefficient of pure Democracy and real Americanism. The irony in this striking situation is that the same influences that will accept Louis’ philanthropy, would bar him instantly if he sought to find a ranking spot himself with the middies [midshipmen].

We cannot win all of our battles with force and arms. Upon occasion, it becomes necessary to whip the opposition with kindness and to apply the doctrines of true Christianity. More victories are won with strategy and diplomacy than with sticks and stones.172

In the end, Louis chose to remind readers of his victories and claimed “‘[d]on’t worry about me losing,’ said Joe smilingly, ‘I’ll be fighting for the Navy and the Navy never loses a battle.’”173 Yet that could not have ended the debate entirely and Louis’s Army enlistment was looming. In fact, Louis did not even wait to be drafted and, instead, volunteered for service the day after the benefit bout for the Navy Relief Society.

5.6 The Soldier

According to Joseph Dorinson, “[w]hen war came, [Louis] was ready: enlisting as a common soldier. In this capacity, 1942-1945, his heroic stature grew. His unselfish commitment to our noble cause, despite the continued strain of segregation, brought millions of blacks to the banner. Louis evoked God and country: he was the ‘people’s choice.’ Elevated by ‘divine grace,’ a mark of heroic, indeed charismatic leadership.

172 The Pittsburgh Courier, November 22, 1941
173 The Chicago Defender, December 6, 1941
Louis crested as an American David.”¹⁷⁴ This telling, however, is problematic for several reasons.

First, Louis served, not as a regular soldier, but in the Army’s Special Services Division, a division reserved for entertainers. In this role he toured military bases in the US and abroad putting on boxing demonstrations and bouts. Because he served in the Special Services, the military could order him to box, keep any earnings he made from winning bouts, and order him to participate in recruiting efforts. In fact, the Army created ‘Joe Louis Troupe’ made up of other Black fighters, George Nicholson, “California Jackie” Wilson, and Sugar Ray Robinson.¹⁷⁵ This fact plays an important role in how the military could use Joe Louis and his image and is in contrast to the ways that the military could use Elvis Presley.

Second, Louis volunteered for service at the urging of his lawyer. His managers knew he was slated to be drafted and he was told to report for his physical. The clean living that was mandated by Joe Louis’s managers was punctuated by Joe Louis volunteering for the army on January 10, 1942, the day after his famous fight against Buddy Baer which raised $47,000 for the Navy Relief Society. While on the surface it seems like a calculated effort on Louis’s managers’ part to keep his squeaky-clean image intact, it had much deeper political and social rights violations and implications.

¹⁷⁴ Dorinson pg. 121
¹⁷⁵ Bak pg. 223
Louis’s manager, lawyer Truman Gibson, assisted the Chief Civilian Advisor to the Secretary of War, William H. Hastie, beginning in 1940 and took the position over in 1943. The Chief Civilian Advisor to the Secretary of War’s main role in the War Department was (supposedly) to advocate for civil rights in the military and to assist with the recruitment of black soldiers. Louis said,

I volunteered for the Army. It was not an overnight decision on my part; I knew I’d have to go anyway and I really wanted to...This was an ugly war. I wanted to get in it, get it over with, and settle down. I was tired of boxing, now, sick and tired of the training and the traveling. When I went to sign up, the Army offered me a commission. No way I could be an officer. I’m not the type; I didn’t have the education. Can you imagine me telling a bunch of soldiers, ‘Take that hill!’? I told you before, I’m no leader. I wanted to be just a plain, ordinary G.I.’ I’d feel closer to people like me.\(^{176}\)

With his dual position it would have appeared untoward if he had, on the one hand, encouraged black American males to join the military and fight for their country while, on the other hand, not encouraging the same of his very profitable asset as his celebrity identity Joe Louis.

Louis’s draft and induction were covered widely, including in African American newspapers, even before his draft was official. On May 3, 1941, the *New York*

\(^{176}\) Louis, Rust, & Rust Jr. pg. 171-172
Amsterdam Star-News ran an article encouraging the Army to draft Louis, give him a commission as a Colonel, claiming that ‘you’ll get more volunteers among colored youngsters if you do,’ and to use him as a morale builder and recruiting tool, while admitting how the loss of Louis would affect his managers.

Should Joe Louis, whose name is magic among millions of folk, both white and black, be permitted to enter the army as a drafty, where should the US Army capitalize on his publicity and his value to his own people as an example and be given a commission and sent out as an athletic supervisor, as many white boxers are doing?

Of course, Joe is a Goldmine to backers and promoters, but if uncle Sam reaches out and grabs him, it will be “Katie bar the door” to all of this and the boys can kiss their golden goose goodbye.

Louis would be of more service giving boxing Exhibitions in the army then he would shoulder a gun and the experience would be valuable to Joe.177

These calls were also coupled with personal photos of Louis during his Army physical to determine his fitness for the draft. There was little doubt that Louis would be found fit and labeled A-1 draftable, and the photos that accompanied reports of his Army physical offered readers access to every invasive aspect of his physical. Very little was shielded from the media’s cameras. Images of Louis during his physical were featured in papers across the country.

177 New York Amsterdam Star-News, May 3, 1941
Figure 18: Photos from *The Chicago Defender* covering Joe Louis’s pre-draft Army physical.\(^{178}\)

\(^{178}\) *The Chicago Defender*, October 25, 1941
Figure 19: “Louis was found to be in ‘good shape.’”

179 *Afro-American*, October 25, 1941
At the time of his induction on January 10, 1942, Louis was arguably the most famous Black man in the country. His service was presented as an example to Black males. He stood as an image of a successful Black male who did not allow his success to negate his duty as a citizen and the War Department sought to capitalize on his image. “[A]dministrators in the War Department and the OWI professed a belief that the use of black cultural symbols could reconcile the escalating "Negro problem" with official pronouncements of American egalitarianism. The use of culture to reduce wartime racial tensions became a subject of frequent debate, as officials questioned which individuals and which sectors of the media could best address black Americans without alarming white Americans.”

According to Skarloff, Louis’s service was a powerful tool that the military and the government used to send the message of the declining racial divide. Skarloff argues that Louis’s service was specifically used to combat African American ambivalence toward the war efforts and military service. The Office of War Information (OWI), which operated from June of 1942 through September of 1945, favored using cultural strategies to combat political problems. But these strategies were far from new.

The war effort in WWII was dependent upon the participation of people from all racial groups in America, but was particularly dependent on African Americans to fill the

Similar photos and/or coverage also appeared in the New York Times, October 14, 1941, and the New York Times, October 15, 1941.

180 Skarloff pg. 959
lower ranks. Because of the need for African American bodies in the service, “[t]he OWI racial adviser Milton Starr proclaimed, ‘the pure principles of democracy are far from fulfillment in the life of the American Negro. Considering the grave dangers facing the country, it is ... desirable and necessary to de-emphasize our many long standing internal dissensions and to close ranks as much as practicable for the duration.’” Essentially Starr was calling on both Whites, but mainly, African Americans to put racial tensions behind them in favor of defeating a shared enemy which, he argued, was worse than the national racial tensions themselves.

Starr’s proclamation echoes W.E.B. DuBois’ unpopular position during WWI and Starr’s stance was, understandably, as unpopular. In 1918, W.E.B. DuBois accepted an officer’s commission in exchange for writing a piece in the NAACP’s magazine, The Crisis, urging Black Americans to ‘close ranks’ with White Americans and join the Allied war effort. This stance was particularly unpopular because many Black Americans saw DuBois’s article as a reversal of opinion and that DuBois was encouraging Black Americans to join the military, which essentially used them as cannon fodder.

Though, unlike other Black Americans who enlisted, Louis’s role as a celebrity led to calls for him to be commissioned as an officer. The New York Amsterdam Star-

\[181\] Skarloff pg. 959
News published an article asking for Louis to be “commissioned at once as an instructor” and encouraging readers to write to the War Department requesting the same.

[T]he Army should offer Louis something in exchange. Fellows far less talented than Louis have turned up as lieutenants, majors, captains, corporals, sergeants etc., Almost as soon as they got into uniforms. Joe could be commissioned at once as an instructor. It’s up to the fans who like a fair deal to see that Joe is taken care of in the right way. Best way to do it is to bombard the war department with letters asking for commission for the heavyweight champion. And they’ll listen down there. They’re men.\(^{182}\)

Possibly knowing a commission would not be granted because of Louis’s race, AC MacNeal, the Managing Editor of the Chicago Defender, sent the following pointed telegram to Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, requesting that Louis be granted a medal for his role in raising money for the war effort. However, the editor’s request was more strongly worded than the request in The New York Amsterdam- Star News and pointedly informed Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, that the newspaper would keep its readers informed of his response.

\(^{182}\) New York Amsterdam Star-News, November 1, 1941
Since Louis and Schmelling met last in the ring, Schmelling had been drafted into the Wehrmacht.
The Honorable Henry L Stimson  
Secretary of War  
Wash DC

Private Joseph Lewis Barrow known to the general public of the United States as Joe Louis heavyweight boxing champion of the world has given in our judgment to the American public the most profound inspiration for the democratic principles for which the republic stands. On January 9, 1942 he risked his title and all that it stands for the benefits of the United States Navy relief fund. He’s agreement to give his share of the proceeds to this of this fight to this fund was instrumental in giving to this were the enterprise $89,092 of which Joe Louis contributed more than $47,000. This contribution came at a time when this fund was less than $5000 and was the largest contribution ever made by an individual to the fund. Very next day Joe Louis enlisted as a volunteer in the United States Army. In making a contribution to the Navy Relief fund he assisted an agency which serves the dependence of the United States Navy personnel knowing full well that he Joe Louis Negro could not join the United States Navy except in the capacity of a messman. The patriotic spirit of Joe Louis in this instance shows the highest type of patriotism yet to be exhibited on the American scene. On March 27, 1942 Private Joseph Louis Barrow a soldier in United States Army again risked his title and all of its emoluments for the benefit of the United States Army relief fund. Out of this fight this army agency received $84,980 with Private Barrow giving again all of his share of the proceeds. It is considered opinion of the Chicago Defender which has for 37 years correctly reflected the opinion of the Americans who are called Negroes that these two patriotic gestures of Joe Louis Barrow should be officially recognized by the United States government. We respectfully suggest that you the secretary of war take immediate steps to get private Joe Louis Barrow a distinguished service medal for his contribution to the development of national unity and general civilian morale. This request comes to you in the name of all citizens of the United States and especially the 13 million Negroes who feel that democracy must apply to all citizens if the nation is to have a full and complete confidence in the democratic way of life. We respectfully request that you indicate if you will proceed to make such a recommendation for a metal for Private Joseph Louis Barrow to the proper authorities. We should be pleased to advise 13 million Americans who are called Negroes of your attitude. Respectfully Chicago Defender AC MacNeal Managing Editor

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183 Telegram sent by AC McNeal, Managing Editor of the Chicago Defender, to Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, April 9, 1942. Joe Louis Barrow Official Military Personnel Files, National Archives Joe Louis Barrow’s Official Military Personnel Files also include several hand-written letters from citizens requesting a medal for Louis.
Though unwilling to commission Louis as an officer, the Army could not avoid the fact that it had a very valuable celebrity in service and sought to use Louis and his celebrity status to the best of its ability. The Army decided to use Louis for morale building and assigned him to the Special Services Division.

5.7 Recruiting

As discussed previously, Jimmy Stewart's service was used for public relations in a limited fashion. His service mainly centered on flying. The air battle was key in WWII. In contrast, Joe Louis’s service was entirely based in public relations, morale building, and gaining support for the war effort, and was centered on the themes of recruiting, commodification, and control.

Almost immediately after being inducted into the military, the Army began using Louis and his image to recruit Black men. A camera crew was waiting when he arrived at the Camp Upton to enlist to shoot a short film of his induction. It shows Louis going through the steps that any other recruit would go through, except for the fact that he had a camera crew in tow. When asked his occupation, he responded, “fighter, and let’s get at them Japs.” The film was staged and released as a news clip in movie theaters across the
country shortly after Louis’s induction.\footnote{http://www.britishpathe.com/video/joe-louis-in-the-army-aka-joe-louis-joins-up} His induction film was just the beginning of his militarization.

![Figure 20: Joe Louis’s induction](image)

Quickly on the heels of Louis’s enlistment, posters of him began appearing encouraging good will toward the war effort and encouraging men to enlist.  Appearing
in a uniform with a rifle and bayonet reminiscent of WWI uniforms and weapons, the poster proudly proclaims:

“Pvt. Joe Louis says_
We’re going to do our part…and we’ll win because we’re on God’s side”
The uniform was outdated; it was a uniform that the American public would remember from the last World War and unconsciously associate with the victory that had been enjoyed by America in that war. It also showed Louis as a combat soldier when, in reality, Louis was far removed from combat in the Special Services Division. His image
as a regular combat soldier is completely performative, like the rest of his celebrity identity. However, that didn’t stop the Army from showing Louis in staged combat settings.

Louis was also presented as a combat soldier in his recruiting poster. The quote on the poster comes from a speech Louis made at a dinner hosted by the Navy Relief Society prior to volunteering for service. Louis was in attendance to bolster support for the war effort and raise money for the Navy Relief Society. According to Donald McRae, Louis’s friend Lucky Millander coined the now famous phrase as “We’ll win because God is on our side.” Because of his nerves Louis rearranged the words to “We’ll win because we’re on God’s side” and was teased viciously by friends for it. But that was short lived when Louis’s version of the quote appeared in newspapers the next day and later on the recruiting poster. Louis’s version of the quote squarely placed the US military and the Allies on the side of good, or God. According to Louis:

Before the fight, the Navy Relief Society wanted me to make a speech. I was nervous as hell. I think I’d rather have gone out and fought Schmeling again than make that speech. I didn’t know what the hell to say, but while I was in training, Lucky Millander, a good friend of mine, came up to the camp, and I told him about my problem. You have to know who Lucky Millander was. He was a jazz band leader and a damn good one.

I was talking to Lucky, and some things he said to me stuck. When I got up on that stage, I said, “I’m only doing what any red blood American would do. We gonna do our part, and we will win, because we are on God’s side.” That became a very special message. Even got a letter from President Roosevelt congratulating

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185 McRae pg. 231
me. Nowadays I heard you can even buy a record with this speech I made. Thank you, Lucky Millander.\footnote{186}

The recruiting poster was not the only example of performed violence in relationship to Louis’s service. While touring Italy with the Joe Louis Troupe, Louis visited a camouflaged gun position and was photographed “pulling the string that fired a huge cannon at the fleeing Nazis.”\footnote{187} This picture and accompanying story appeared in several papers across the country including the \textit{New York Amsterdam News} and \textit{The Chicago Defender}. However, there are real problems with this photo.

\footnote{186}Louis, Rust, \& Rust Jr. pg. 173-174 \footnote{187}New York Amsterdam News, October 14, 1944
Firstly, Louis’s uniform is not the same as the one worn by the rest of the troops in the photo. Louis is shown wearing Class A’s and not wearing a helmet, where all of the other troops, presumably ones who were actually in combat, wore fatigues and pit helmets. Louis’s Class A’s were reserved for office work and travel. Secondly, the

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188 *The Chicago Defender*, October 14, 1944
soldiers who appeared in the photo with Louis did not appear to be in the middle of combat or running off Nazis, instead they had their backs turned to the battlefield and were focusing on Louis and the photographer. No one is looking at where the cannon is aimed. This would have been a fatal mistake in the heat of battle. Finally, the photo only shows Louis holding the ‘string that fired a huge cannon’ and shows no evidence that he actually fired the cannon.

All evidence in this picture suggests that Louis did not participate in combat and that the picture was staged. Though, that is unimportant. What is important is the story and that the Army was presenting Louis as a combat soldier, a loyal fighter fighting for his country, albeit in a safe and sanitized way. The military publication, *Stars & Stripes Magazine*, attempted to add an element of danger to this story when it reported that Louis had avoided death in the very same camouflaged gun position by 24-hours. The day after Louis’s photo had been taken, the cannon with which he was pictured misfired and the “barrel exploded.” This malfunction killed several soldiers. Though, by this time, Louis was hundreds of miles away visiting other troops and fighting another performed boxing exhibition.

Louis’s celebrity identity and his assignment to the Special Services Division led to the creation of more media centered on Louis. “Louis’s popular appeal allowed him an

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189 Actually known as a lanyard
190 *The Chicago Defender*, October 14, 1944
191 Bak pg. 277
easy transition from all-black cast films to more mainstream pictures. In the role of a military officer in *This Is the Army* (1943), a war propaganda film strategically released during the height of the Second World War, it was politically correct for African Americans to appear as soldiers. The plot of the film centered around two generations of soldiers who put on all-soldier stage shows to raise moral during WWI and WWII. Louis was recruited for the picture by the War Department primarily ‘for story purposes and to head the production number, “What the Well-Dressed Man in Harlem Will Wear.”’

According to Louis:

I ran into a guy who used to dance at the Cotton Club, who told me that he was dancing in a play called *This is the Army* and traveling all over the country. He said that they were going to Hollywood to make the picture, so I thought, hey, that’s a good gig for me. They were always telling me what a good morale builder I was, and besides, I loved Hollywood. I called the man in charge of Second Command, and he arranged for me to go there.193

The film follows the staging and performance of two soldier shows, the first to support the war effort in WWI and the second to support the WWII war effort.

Louis is featured in one song in the WWII soldier show, but there is also a scene showing him competing in an exhibition bout, one of ninety-six exhibition bouts that he

192 Regester pg. 283
193 Louis, Rust, & Rust Jr. pg. 181
participated in throughout his forty-six months in the Army, while a voiceover on the camp’s loud speaker calls for SGT Joe Louis to report for duty. 194 Though Ronald Regan, who was in the Army Reserves at the time, also appears prominently in the film, Louis is the only person who plays himself.

Figure 23: “What the Well-Dressed Man in Harlem Will Wear” 195

194 Sklaroff pg. 974
195 This is the Army 1942, Getty Images
“[This is the Army] was, in the purest sense, a tool for morale building and the film itself left no questions about it. A line from the film highlights this. “Sergeant, there’s a very necessary element in soldiering. It goes by various names, but let’s call it morale.... What I mean is that war is a pretty grim business, and sometimes a song or a smile is just as vital to an army as food. Teach your men to fight, naturally, but don’t discourage their attempts to entertain one another. As a matter of fact, encourage them.”196 Though the morale that This is the Army set to build was not only that of soldiers, but equally important, that of the American people. The film set out to raise spirits and entertain.

The film also shows how the views of race had changed between WWI and WWII. In the WWI minstrel show, there is one song that white actors crudely perform in blackface. In the WWII minstrel show, one number was performed by Black actors, though only one number. Also of note is that White actors and Black actors did not appear together on stage of in the scenes leading up to the number, save for Joe Louis exchanging brief words with the show’s producer. “This Is the Army, like the Army itself was wholly segregated: The black soldiers appear only in this one sequence, and with the exception of a short exchange between George Murphy and Joe Louis and an extremely brief shot of the black performers running offstage after their number, blacks and whites never appear on the screen at the same time.”197 The exchange between Louis and actor

196 This is the Army and Cabaniss pg. 57
197 Cabaniss pg. 59
George Murphy was brief. In it the producer Jerry Jones (played by Murphy) approaches Louis as the other Black soldiers clamor around them in the background.

Jerry Jones: Hello, Joe. Nervous?

Joe Louis: Mr. Jones, I quit worrying the day I got into uniform. All I know is I’m in Uncle Sam’s Army and we on God’s side.

This exchange shows the familiarity that America felt when it came to Joe Louis. Jerry Jones did not hesitate calling him ‘Joe,’ even though he was Sgt. Joseph Louis Barrow at the time. Louis was an American hero. However, this exchange also shows the informality with which Black men were addressed with during WWII. Just as Jerry Jones did not hesitate in calling him ‘Joe’ out of familiarity, it would have been uncharacteristic for a White man to address a Black man by anything other than his first name. Louis, on the other hand, was expected to call Jerry Jones, Mr. Jones, as a sign of respect for a White man and, to a lesser extent, the show’s producer.

The number, though disguised as lighthearted, also carried over many racial stereotypes of the day. “‘That's What the Well-Dressed Man in Harlem Will Wear” is a now embarrassing piece of latter-day minstrelsy, performed in front of a set featuring
huge Sambo figures.”  The scene featured Louis in the foreground continually hitting a punching bag. Not singing. Not dancing. Just hitting a punching bag. It was clear that Louis’s only role, in the number, in the movie, in the Army, and in the war, was to box. By extension, Louis’s limited role in the film also showed the acceptable role of Black males in the war effort, as a fighter and conformist.

The number also featured two groups of Black actors. One group portrayed Black soldiers looking smart in their uniforms and performing in rank and file. The other, smaller group was dressed in zoot suits and loitering at the back of the stage portraying Black men who were not currently in the service. This number was clear. The zoot suiters represented their generation’s form of ‘cool pose.’ This ‘cool pose’ had no place in WWII America and Black males performing this ‘cool pose’ were denigrated by the film and American media.

The song itself, playing on Harlem’s history as a Mecca for the Black community and Black style, called for Black men to put away the clothes that they had previously considered stylish, zoot suits, as the staging suggested, and put on a uniform. At the time, zoot suits were mainly tied with Mexican American youth in California and the Zoot Suit Riots which began on June 2, 1943. Though released on August 14, 1943, the producers of This is the Army were clearly conscious of the trouble brewing and recognized the role of style in subcultures that were not understood by and feared by

198 Alpers pg. 146-147
White America. The lyrics reinforced White America’s idea of what a Black man should be and, in the case of the song and scene, how he should appear.

What the Well-Dressed Man in Harlem Will Wear
Irving Berlin

There's a change in fashion that shows
In those Lennox Avenue clothes
Mister Dude has disappeared with his flashy tie
You'll see in the Harlem Esquire
What the well-dressed man will desire
When he's struttin' down the street with his sweetie-pie

Sun tan
Shade of green
Or an olive drab color scheme
That's what the well-dressed man in Harlem will wear

Dressed up
In O.D.'s
With a tin hat for overseas
That's what the well-dressed man in Harlem will wear

Top hat, white tie and tails no more
They've been put away till after the war

If you
Want to know
Take a look at Brown Bomber Joe
That's what the well-dressed man in Harlem will wear

The message was clear. When presented as a dichotomy, being cool like ‘Mister Dude’ in his ‘flashy tie’, on the one side (represented by the large Sambo cartoons of Zoot Suiters in the background), and being in the service and wearing a ‘shade of green
or an olive drab color scheme,’(represented by Joe Louis in the foreground) on the other. Being in the service and in uniform was the acceptable role of the two for Black males.\textsuperscript{199} 

\textit{This is the Army} was pure entertainment, raised morale on the homefront, and masked the violence of war by translating military service through song and dance. Though, this was not the only film that Louis appeared in during his service.

\textit{The Negro Soldier} (1944) was produced by the Army to be shown to Black soldiers as part of orientation. However, with time, the film was shown to all soldiers during orientation and eventually was shown in movie theaters across the country. The film begins with the image of a large modern gothic church and the viewer is taken inside to be shown that it is a church in a Black community. The preacher begins speaking about a well-worn topic of the day, the war effort, and briefly talks about Joe Louis and his role in the war effort contrasting Louis’s service with that of Max Schmelling, who was drafted into the Wehrmacht.

Louis is presented as a key player in any chance for an Allied victory. The film sets both Louis and Schmelling up to relive their famous fights and suggests that Louis will win, as he did in his second fight against Schmelling.\textsuperscript{200} This, however, is all a performance. The third fight on the battlefield never occurred. “In one minute and forty-nine seconds an American fist won a victory. But it wasn’t the final victory. Now these

\textsuperscript{199}Cabaniss pg. 59
\textsuperscript{200}This bares remarkable similarity to Louis’s statement that he desired to meet Schmelling again in ‘No Man’s Land,’ though, the original quote, just like the brief scene in \textit{The Negro Soldier} was completely performative.
\textit{New York Amsterdam Star-News}, November 1, 1941
two men who were matched in the ring that night are matched again. This time in a far
greater arena and for much greater stakes.”201 The film completely ignores the fact that
Louis lost his first fight against Schmelling in June, 1936 and, as much propaganda does,
focuses only on the victory, while hiding the fact that Louis was not serving as a combat
soldier but as an entertainer in the Special Services Division.

Thomas Cripps and David Culbert analyzed how The Negro Soldier influenced
race relations in the United States after its release, but they pay only the briefest attention
to Joe Louis and his role in the publicity surrounding the film and its marketing to White
civilian audiences. Rather, Cripps and Culbert focused on the social science research that
went into making The Negro Soldier. “Race, unlike white ethnicity, was of great interest
to the social scientists of the Research Branch, who devoted much effort to studying the
color line in the American military.” 202 There were four main groups involved in making
the film. The first group involved was the Army. In WWII, the Army had a racial
problem. When Joe Louis joined, the Army was still segregated and depended on Black
men enlisting in order to have any chance at victory.

The second group was the Black community “who saw World War II as a time to
bring an end to longstanding discrimination.”203 The social scientists and producers who
worked on The Negro Soldier were conscious of the discrimination that existed and

201 The Negro Soldier
202 Alpers pg. 146-147
203 Cripps & Culbert pg. 618
intended the film to show the virtues of service to Black men who had enlisted and draw light to Black service members roles in the war effort and in wars of the past. This was a radical idea. “The first two years of the war saw little change. Blacks were patronized in the few films with specific Negro themes released by federal agencies, either by overpraising Jim Crow schools (Negro Colleges in Wartime), or by celebrating ‘safe’ heroes such as George Washington Carver.”204 This film is one of the first films released by federal agencies that strove to restore Black men’s dignity through film. According to Langston Hughes, the *Negro Soldier* was “the most remarkable Negro film ever flashed on the American screen.”205

The third group consisted of social scientists who had been hired to work on the film. According to Cripps and Culbert, these social scientists “felt that scientific research could identify precisely what kind of film might bring white and black America closer together…and they wanted a documentary film about the Negro.”206 The social scientists who worked on the film saw the film as a social science experiment and as a way to unite Blacks and Whites behind the war effort.

The fourth, and final group, was Hollywood. Noted Hollywood director Frank Capra directed the film and was billed as Col. Frank Capra, as he volunteered for service with the Special Services Division shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor and was

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204 Cripps & Culbet pg. 619  
205 Bak pg. 227  
206 Cripps & Culbert pg. 620
inducted as a Major in recognition of his potential usefulness in the war effort. He brought along civilians who he had worked with in Hollywood as well. For Hollywood, “The Negro Soldier played a significant part in furthering a dramatic shift in the kinds of roles blacks received in feature films; after 1945 the era of the ‘message’ film was at hand.” 207 The film attempted to break through stereotypes and “actually tried to weave the Negro into the fabric of American life” by presenting the Black community in a dignified manner and focusing on aspects that could be clearly seen in White America as well. 208 This is evident from the very first shot of the Black congregation in church, a scene that, if replacing the Black actors with White actors, would be very familiar to White America. While The Negro Soldier was created to be shown to Black soldiers when they enlisted, Black soldiers rated it highly and suggested that it be shown to White soldiers as well. It received a similarly positive response from White soldiers and, in time, the Army decided to release it in theaters.

207 Cripps & Culbert pg. 622
208 Cripps & Culbert pg. 622
Once it was decided that *The Negro Soldier* would be shown in movie theaters across the country so civilians could see the film, a movie poster was created with the clear intention of convincing movie goers, both Black and White, to purchase tickets to the showings. The poster features a large drawing of Joe Louis in uniform holding a rifle. On a much smaller scale is a group of nine unidentifiable Black soldiers. The banner on the top of the poster announced “Americas (sic) Joe Louis vs. The Axis!” The poster suggests that Louis has a large role in the film despite the fact that he is only on screen.
for less than 90 seconds. Perhaps because of this marketing ruse, the film was a
commercial flop. The film also played in far fewer theaters than other government
released films of the day. “It played in only 1,819 theaters in contrast to most OWI
shorts which played in more than 13,000 theaters.” Consequently, the film was
unsuccessful in earning much money for the war effort or stoking the militarized
economy.

Additionally, the reception in the Black press, like the Amsterdam News, the
oldest Black newspaper in the country, was overwhelmingly positive and focused on how
the Black man was presented in the film.

One cannot believe that such dignity and integrity inherent in the script would
have ever been accomplished in this generation. When this reviewer saw a
preview of the film...he kept pondering this fact: Who on earth thought such a
thing could be done so accurately – without propaganda, without sugar-coating
and without the jackass clowning the movie acting Negro usually degrades
himself to...

The movie succeeds in proving that this is the Negro’s war. He is too deeply
rooted in the making of this great country – he has as much at stake in its destiny
as any other waver of the red, white, and blue. If any child, white, black, or blue
ever wants to try for the past 300 years, let him spend 40 minutes seeing this
picture and he will have learned a life’s lesson...  

209 Cripps & Culbert pg. 632  
210 Bak pg. 227
Other attempts at commodifying Louis’s service were more successful. Boxing matches arranged as fundraisers were wildly successful. During his service, Louis fought fundraising bouts against Buddy Baer and Abe Simon and donated $111,082 to the war effort.\footnote{McRae pg. 234} *This is the Army* grossed $9,55,586.44 for the Army Emergency Fund and was the highest grossing film of 1943. Louis was the only active duty soldier who was featured in the film. Ronald Regan was a reservist assigned to the Provisional Task Force Show Unit in Burbank, CA while filming *This is the Army*.

5.8 Louis Masking the Horrors of War

Joe Louis took part in no real, un-staged, non-performative violence while he served in the Special Services Division. The fact that the Special Services Division is set aside for entertainers and athletes guaranteed that Louis would be protected from danger because his value as a morale builder and recruiting tool was too valuable to the war effort. In this way, they successfully used the militarization of Joe Louis to mask the horrors of war.

Louis’s militarization presented military service as entertainment. This was particularly evident in the film *This is the Army*. The plot of the musical comedy was pure camp and showed two generations of soldiers staging all-soldier shows in WWI and WWII. Louis’s part in the film consisted of a few lines, including his famous quote from

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Max Baer: 
Joseph Louis is the best man in the world, and I am the worst.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Louis: 
Poppycock!}
\end{flushright}

\footnote{Louis donated $45,882 from his fight against Buddy Baer to the Navy and $65,200 from his fight against Abe Simon to the Army, his entire purse from both bouts.}
the recruiting poster that featured Louis, a little marching, and then punching a punching bag while the other Black actors performed a song.

![Image](http://anotheraldmovieblog.blogspot.com/2009/11/this-is-army-1943.html)

Figure 25: Image from the dream sequence of *This is the Army* that saw soldiers dress in drag. (1943)

The rest of the film was even more outrageous and even featured soldiers in drag during a dream sequence. *This is the Army* was the furthest thing from the realities of military service and made military service look like, for want of a better term, a song and dance.

Louis’s militarization also obscured the horrors of war by presenting an idealized version of military service. Photos like the ones of Louis being woken by reveille and waiting in the chow line prior to his induction were staged, idealized images of the military and military service, but they were not the only ones. Almost immediately after his induction on January 10, 1942, *Life Magazine* featured an article about Louis’s service including the following photos.

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213 *New Journal and Guide*, October 18, 1941
Life Magazine, January 26, 1942 feature shows Louis at a popular nightclub and then at Camp Upton, NY on his first day of active duty.

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Life Magazine, January 26, 1942

The Life Magazine, January 26, 1942 feature shows Louis at a popular nightclub and then at Camp Upton, NY on his first day of active duty.
The image on the left shows Louis the night before beginning active duty, Louis’s ‘last night of freedom’ at a nightclub, while the one on the right shows Louis during his first day of active duty at Camp Upton, NY. Both photos are far removed from the combat that many of his fellow countrymen were now in the thick of once the United States declared war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Nights out at nightclubs were not the norm for servicemen in 1942, even if they were stationed stateside. The photo on the right also presents an unrealistic view of service by showing Louis on his own with no one around. Military training is not and was not a solitary activity; however, this staged photo presents Louis as the sole focus standing watch completely out of harm’s way.

Photos of Louis training for boxing matches also drew attention away from the realities of combat and masked the horrors of war. The photo below shows Louis training at Fort Dix, NJ while visiting military bases across the country. This training was very different from the combat training that his fellow recruits took part in.
Figure 27: Joe Louis “train[s] for fights at the Fort Dix U.S. Army camp”\footnote{http://www.espn.com/sports/boxing/news/story?id=3252137}

Finally, the militarization of Louis presented performed, controlled, sanitized violence through Louis’s exhibition bouts.
Though, admittedly, the main purpose of his touring military bases both before and after his induction was to put on boxing exhibition bouts to raise morale. Images of these exhibition bouts and the bouts themselves mask the violence of the horrors of war by presenting a performative violence where there is no real danger to anyone involved and

216 Getty Images
not even a title at stake. While the militarization of Louis both before and after his induction into the U.S. Army masked the horrors of war, Louis’s service still held immense importance at the time. Perhaps Louis, himself, best sums up his service and contribution:

Well, thank God the war ended in August [1945]. We won it. I knew I’d soon be discharged, and I wanted to get back in that ring as soon as possible. Thirty-two years old, I had some good fighting and money-making years ahead of me. On October 1, 1945, I was discharged at Camp Shanks, New York. I tell you one thing, the Army was a great experience for me, but I wouldn’t ever want to do it again. I’d been in for forty-six months and I’d traveled over 70,000 miles and was seen by close to 5,000,000 service-men. I had been in ninety-six exhibition fights, and I had volunteered to do this. I don’t know how many hospitals I visited, but I know a lot of guys seemed to feel better when I was there to cheer them up. When I was being discharged, they had a military review and I was given the Legion of Merit Medal ‘for exceptionally meritorious conduct.’ Major General Kells made a speech telling people how valuable I had been to the morale of the Armed Services; it made me feel great.217

217 Louis, Rust, & Rust Jr. pg. 189-190
On March 24, 1958, the United States Army undertook a mission as complex as a wartime invasion, as precarious as the second stripe on a corporal’s sleeve.

Objective: to transform a $105,000-a-month rock-‘n’-roll idol into an $83.20-a-month GI…to convert one civilian-nomenclature: Mr. Elvis “The Pelvis” Presley – into Army private US5331-761…and to treat him ‘just like everyone else’ throughout his two-year hitch.

- Alan Levy

*Operation Elvis*

6.1 Argument

This case study argues that the transformation of Presley’s celebrity identity through his military service saved his career. Though Presley served during the Cold War and not when America was in an active war, the possibility of war breaking out at any moment was a reality, and a very real fear, in the decade following WWII. The militarization of Elvis Presley masks the horrors of war in the following ways: 1) the lack of information about Presley’s military service released by the military made the media the main source of information about Presley’s military service, 2) the use of military images and themes by Presley’s management presented an idealized and sanitized version

218 All documents presented in this section retain their original grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors so as to not alter the tone.
of military service, even after his death, and 3) Presley’s militarization can be seen as having transformed his celebrity identity and career.

With his deep voice, dark hair, and mesmerizing hips, Elvis Presley was an idol to millions of teenage girls and a hero to many a teenage boy in mid-1950’s America. Elvis Aron Presley was born on January 8, 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi. Early in Elementary school Presley showed talent for music, but it wasn’t until a talent show in High School that his talent caught the attention of his peers. In August 1953, Presley paid to record a couple of songs at Sun Records as a gift for his mother. Once the owner, Sam Phillips, heard the recordings he signed Presley and they began releasing material. In 1955 he was approached by Colonel Tom Parker, his future manager and shot into rock and roll history.

His music, hairstyle, and mode of dress was emulated by teenage boys, while teenage girls participated in consumer rituals by purchasing and wearing items produced by Presley’s team of managers, marketers, and producers, like lipstick named after Presley songs. Presley was a cultural and economic phenomena.

These rituals, to an extent, reinforced gender roles of the times. Girls wore Elvis Presley lipstick and Elvis Presley Dog Tag jewelry when he was drafted into the military. Boys grew their hair out into his famous ‘ducktail’ hairstyle and wore blue jeans like Presley. Through boys and girls had dressed in similar manner prior to Presley, parents had a new person to blame for not being able to recognize and understand their own children. Their children, led by Elvis Presley, were challenging social norms and demanding social change.
However, while his deviant, dangerous persona and sexually charged stage show were venerated by teenagers, the parents of America found Presley, his anti-social behavior, and his unbridled sexuality, less than entertaining. As Presley’s behavior continued to spiral out of control and the American media began to focus more attention on his indiscretions and misdeeds his popularity among his teenage fan base continued to soar. The American media went to great lengths to draw comparisons between Presley’s style and deviance of sexuality, gender, and social norms. Emulation of Presley’s style was, in parents’ eyes, was interpreted as accepting Presley in his entirety and taking on his anti-social lifestyle, questionable gender, and deviant behavior.

It was during this time, on March 24, 1958, at the height of his early fame, that Presley was drafted into the United States Army to report for a two-year tour of duty out of the spotlight and in Germany.

Presley was drafted during the height of his early fame and Presley’s draft garnered a substantial amount of attention for both Presley and the U.S. Army. So much attention that the Army released the following after his service:

Elvis A Presley, US 53 310 761, was inducted into the military service 24 March 1958; the part of the United States 22 September 1959; and arrived in Bremerhaven, Germany, 30 September 1958. He was assigned to headquarters Company, first medium tank battalion, 32nd armored, Frankfurt, Germany from one October 1958 to 2 March 1960 and return to the United States three March
1960. Sergeant Presley was honorably released from active duty five March 1960 and transferred to the Army reserve to complete his reserve obligation.\textsuperscript{219}

This chapter analyzes the symbiotic relationship between Elvis Presley, the military, and the public relations and marketing materials released by both sides and examines how Elvis and his military service were presented in articles that appeared in major American publications and through material culture between 1956 and 1961. Studying this time period and this example of the intersection between the military and celebrity spotlights a point in history where marketing and product creation has been conducted by both the culture industry and the government. Traditionally marketing has been looked at from the perspective of the product or the consumer, but this instance in history allows a look at the product, the consumer, and the producers, the celebrity and the military, in a unique way.

Although Presley’s time in the military technically took him out of the public eye for two years, it was a period of symbiotic transformation for both Presley and the military and his military service transformed Presley in a way that would not have been possible before his service. The transformation of Presley from a sloppy, long haired, hip swiveling, rock ‘n’ roll boy, into a patriotic, upstanding, American man was beneficial to

\textsuperscript{219} Letter from Eugene S. Tarr, Colonel, ACC Commanding to Curtis F. Meek, November 9, 1961 Official Military Personnel Files of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
Presley’s music career and laid the groundwork for his enduring fame and continued service to the military.

6.2 Presley’s Celebrity Identity

There were many divergent themes that went into the construction of Elvis Presley’s celebrity including race, sexuality, rock ‘n’ roll, and youth and delinquency; these firmly situated within popular culture. Popular culture is a site where domination and cultural power has "real effects, despite being neither all powerful nor all inclusive." Culture is divided by education and scholars into popular and non-popular, or niche, with each being in a constant state of flux. What is considered popular today can, in time, be appropriated by high culture and, in turn, what is considered high culture loses its value and is absorbed by the popular. Movements, new and radical, always begin as non-popular, or niche, before gaining momentum and being considered popular.

Stuart Hall’s approach to popular culture places the individual in the role of the producer and consumer instead of limiting the individual to just one or pitting one class against another or industry against helpless consumers. Hall posits a situation; much like Dick Hebdige does, where popular culture is a site of negotiation or a battleground, not between groups, or industry. Popular culture is a "critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled." It is on this battlefield that something that may have once been considered trivial, banal, or

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220 Hall in Samuel
221 Proctor pg. 1
niche can become recognized, valued, and gain cultural value. Conversely it is here that something considered to have high cultural value can lose favor and become niche again. Popular culture is a site of dissent and negotiation between hegemony and resistance. Hall argues that there is not a firm dividing line between popular culture, or culture and cultural products that had been traditionally and, in Hall’s opinion, erroneously tied to the people, and high culture, or culture and cultural products that had erroneously been tied to the elite. Rather, popular culture and high culture are fluid and used in different ways in different instances and times. Hall’s perspective allows for cultural items, even if they are created by the culture industry to have the same chance within popular culture. Its site or circumstance of creation does not preclude it from being considered high art. Neither does its site or circumstance of creation preclude it from losing value and being considered popular culture.

For this study, the fluidity that Hebdige and Hall allow for is essential. Though Elvis Presley and his music were created by major record labels, his persona and music allowed for resistance against dominant norms through its emergent nature and the youth subculture it helped locate. The fluidity of Hall’s theory is especially important as it can be used to trace the ways that Presley and his music have been used in different ways and valued differently through time. In spite of the current recognition of Presley as the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll, when Presley sprung onto the scene in 1954 he was seen as a threat.

The creation and marketing of Presley swiftly followed the recording of his first single and was originally spearheaded by Sam Philips and Presley’s manager Colonel Tom Parker. “In his quest to secure his star’s popularity (and his own bank balance), the
bogus “Colonel” Tom Parker, Presley’s manager, combined the visual and the auditory with the singer’s corporeal image, which was taken to every household that could afford a television set – the latest “modcon” of 1950s America.” Presley’s first single, recorded at Sun Studios on July 5, 1954 was his version of “That’s Alright Mama,” a song by black blues artist, Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup. After recording the song bassist Bill Black remembers thinking, “Damn. Get that on the radio and they’ll run us out of town.” It made its radio debut 3 days later on Dewy Phillips’s Red, Hot and Blue show on WHBQ. The hysteria had begun and so too had the threat of rock ‘n’ roll.

Because of its roots in black music, rock ‘n’ roll, and particularly Presley’s music, was inextricably tied to one another and, as such, the fear associated with each bled over into the other. “The threat of black music in 1950s America is largely that of black culture itself.” According to Bertrand, Presley and his music subtly suggested that “African Americans and working-class whites might have had more in common than not, [and because of] Presley’s crossing of the color line undermined the myths and stereotypes that sustained Jim Crow segregation” he and his music were tied with black culture. In the mid-late 1950s, “Elvis was a ‘proletarian provincial, an exotic and repulsive Other’” and this was clearly voiced by the American media.

222 Sewlall pg. 46-47
223 August 11-17, 2007 “Would he still be King?” Radio Times BBC p. 12
224 Linden pg. 50
225 Bertrand pg. 64
226 Bertrand pg. 64
Newspaper coverage of Elvis Presley before his induction into the United States Army was overwhelmingly critical and echoed the sentiments of the parents of America’s teenagers, particularly parents of teenage girls. Writers and readers were divided into two camps, Presley fans, who were typically teenagers, and those opposed to him, generally the parents of teenagers. Presley fans supported their idol with a ferocity that had not been seen previously. Two Presley fans wrote the Washington Post and Times Herald to declare their love for Elvis. According to Peggy Hile and Jean Wicker, “Presley [was] the mostest, greatest, bestest and handsomest guy around!”\(^{227}\)

Anti-Presley readers of the New York Times described Elvis as “a ‘sad sack’ reminiscent of the late James Dean,” “a whirling dervish of sex,” and “an escape from reality in the form of a ‘Pied Piper.’”\(^{228}\) Newspaper journalists even chose sides on the debate. Even so, few journalists in the late 1950’s wrote about Presley and his music with as much venom as the Washington Post and Times Herald’s Lawrence Laurent, though his disdain was directed at Presley’s fans and their adoration of the star more than at Presley himself. Much of Laurent’s derision of Presley fans stemmed from their fervent devotion to their idol and the fanatical behavior.

Laurent’s first article about Presley, published in the Washington Post and Times Herald on June 23, 1956, drew parallels between Elvis Presley and Liberace, condemned

\(^{227}\) Washington Post and Times Herald, July 1, 1956
\(^{228}\) New York Times, December 17, 1956
Presley fans for their grammar, and called the fans “freaks.” Like many of Laurent’s early articles about Presley, this article was written in a point-counterpoint style and pitted letters written by Presley fans against those written by members of the public who were less than fond of him. The letters written by Presley fans that were printed used fanatical, simplistic language and conformed to the popular vernacular used by teenagers in the late 1950’s that was rarely grammatically correct.

The anti-Presley readers who wrote into Laurent expressed the opinion that Presley, his music, and his gyrating hips reduced the teenage daughters of America into hysterical, crying, wild animals who, while gathered together in worship of their idol, would behave in ways unbecoming of young ladies. A rare anti-Presley teenager identified as 17-year-old George Scheele wrote to Laurent’s column to voice his concern about the behavior of female teenage Presley fans. According to Scheele, “a girl listening to an Elvis record alone in her room won’t shout, but out in a crowd she’ll shout” and expressed his disfavor for female Presley fans’ fanatical behavior by mentioning a story that had appeared in an earlier edition of the *Washington Post and Times Herald* “about [a] girl who didn’t wash her face for two weeks after Elvis kissed her.” The *Washington Post and Times Herald* also printed an article about the president of a local Presley fan club that took a leave of absence from work and spent the entire day at a movie theater watching Presley’s movie, *Love Me Tender*.

229 *Washington Post and Times Herald*, June 23, 1956
230 *Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 26, 1956
Screaming, crying, questionable hygiene, and repeated screenings of Presley films were mild compared to some of the other behavior attributed to Presley fans. For example, on October 22, 1956, the *Washington Post and Times Herald* ran an article that female teenage Presley fans had torn his car apart, “scrawled love messages in lipstick all over his white Cadillac and ripped the upholstery.”\(^2\) William Leonard described a crowd of girls’ reaction to a performance as “sheer violence.”\(^3\) This behavior could not have pleased their parents.

6.3 Disrupting the Status Quo: Imitation and Deviance

Presley did not just have influence over his female fans; male teenage fans were also influenced by him, his hairstyle, and his clothing. Presley concerned many adults of the time, including Detroit Councilman Eugene Van Antwerp. Antwerp claimed that “Presley is a disgrace to so-called modern art in the field of music. His gyrations may be all right in certain places – such as radio – but they shouldn’t be displayed publicly on television.” Why was Van Antwerp so concerned about Presley being seen? According to Van Antwerp, “immodesty invites emulation by children.”\(^4\) Van Antwerp’s concern may not have been misplaced. In an article in the *Washington Post and Times Herald*, John Crosby quoted a California policeman who, “after watching him writhe around a stage, commented, ‘If he did that on the street we’d arrest him.’”\(^5\) *The New York Times*

\(^2\) *Washington Post and Times Herald*, October 22, 1956
\(^3\) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 1, 1956
\(^4\) *Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 30, 1956
\(^5\) *Washington Post and Times Herald*, June 18, 1956
Jack Gould dubbed Presley, “the virtuoso of the hootchy-kootchy,” a dance form “that heretofore has been primarily identified with the repertoire of the blonde bombshells of the burlesque runway.”

While many children across the country did attempt to emulate Presley’s supercharged performances and innovative dance moves, the more visual forms of emulation were seen in their hair and clothes, particularly when it came to his male fans. Presley even had a hairdo named after him, thanks to the popularity of the style. The most visible form of imitation of Presley was seen in boys’ hair. Parents in America suddenly found that they did not need to bother their sons about combing their hair anymore. Instead boys, especially boys who wore their hair like Presley, were continually combing their hair. Parents now were asking their sons to “[g]o out to the hall mirror to comb your hair,” chastising “[d]on’t comb your hair in the kitchen!,” and “don’t do it in the dining room.” Parents had wanted their sons to have a care for their hair, but not long hair like this.

A hairdo barber-poles apart from the Madison Avenue Cut is what the trade calls an *Elvis*. It is worn by teen-agers called ‘rocks’ and its prototype, of course, is atop that boy. An Elvis is all hair and a mile high, hanging over the temples, deliberately, and with a long slashing sideburn. Some rocks have entered the Army wearing an Elvis. A barber on Governor’s Island says that there is no official short Army cut these days, ‘but one of those rock ‘n’ roll haircuts would

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235 *New York Times*, June 6, 1956
Some scholars, like Wise and Zolov, argue that Presley represents an idol that embodied all the macho ideals of the 1950s, it can be argued the Presley preformed a feminized borderline queer masculinity and critiques like this echo that argument.

236 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1958
never pass inspections.’ Barbers at military camps are being urged – as an easy transitional haircut – to push what they call a Post-Elvis, which has normal sideburns and is somewhat less sinister.  

It must be pointed out that Herbert Mitgang calls Presley ‘that boy,’ even though he was 23 at the time. Suggesting a malicious tone, the use of ‘that boy’ belittles Presley and any contributions he may have made through his music or his style. Tying back to race, ‘boy’ was also a term that was widely used when referencing Black men of any age and is tied to the South’s history of slavery and the view of Black men as second-class citizens. Mitgang also calls Presley’s hairstyle “sinister,” giving Presley’s hair, a part of his image, more power to cause damage and threaten than the singer himself. Further ingraining the notion that the ‘Elvis’ hairdo is sinister, in November 1956, Amos Reed, superintendent of the Illinois State Training School for Boys said, “We have boys that come in here with ‘Presley’ sideburns and we ‘divest’ them.”

Nice boys were not sent to juvenile correction institutions like the Illinois State Training School and it would not be hard to imagine the boys who ended up there for committing any range of crimes to be sporting ‘sinister’ Presley-like hairdos. Nice boys didn’t have long hair. “To me it, [the hairstyle,] is an indication on the part of young people that they have independence and are breaking with adults.”

237 New York Times, June 2, 1957
238 New York Times, June 2, 1957
not “permit that sort of thing.” And there it is. Style is a way to break from adults, or society, and within this institution that would not be tolerated.

Elvis Presley’s celebrity image was constructed in such a way that presented a lifestyle and image that jived with the reality that existed in America in the 1950s. According to Guy DeBord, “[s]tars – spectacular representations of living human beings – project this general banality into images of permitted roles. As specialists of apparent life, stars serve as superficial objects that people can identify with to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations that they actually live.” Stars act as innovators who create new lifestyles and images from real or imagined lifestyles or images that already exist within society, but just below the surface.

Stars like Presley offered an imagined lifestyle that contained just enough of a resemblance to reality that fans could believe that that lifestyle actually existed, that the star actually lived that reality, and that that lifestyle was actually attainable by, not only the star, but regular people. It is important to remember that stars are legitimated by society and, as such, are approved by society. Certain amounts of innovation are allowed by society and this innovation must match with what is acceptable by and exists within society. According to Linden, “Elvis as a white practitioner was not enough to immediately inoculate the white masses to the perceived threat of black popular music. Instead, we can see this as a process of development […] certain elements of his early

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239 Chicago Daily Tribune, November 27, 1956
240 DeBord, pg. 29
image were too much for the mainstream public to cope with, and they had to be removed. As Ballard has already told us, the “movement of the butt” was simply too much for the older generation, but it was exactly the thing that made the youngsters go wild.” Socially, he would not have been allowed to succeed if he did not voice some part of social reality, and the social reality that he voiced was just below the surface. Even though the lifestyle that Presley presented was tolerated when Presley lived it, imitation was viewed as deviant.

Deviance is not a product of cultural and social ignorance of American society in the 1950s, rather, it is in reaction to an abundant understanding of the workings and expectations of society and an outright denial of them. During the Cold War deviance took on a whole new meaning in relation to the idea of the American family. According to Leerom Medovoi, the idea of the American family presented socially acceptable molds that individuals were to fit into. “Cold War discourse proclaimed the new suburbs as the apotheosis of American freedom, a utopian space of national abundance in which people could at last fully realize their individuality by making consumer choices that expressed and satisfied their inner wants. From this perspective, Americans who questioned or opposed the promise of suburbia could be constituted at the internal enemies of American freedom who, like the external Soviet enemy, needed to be prevented from acting out

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241 Linden pg. 53  
242 Medovoi, pg. 168
their subversive intentions. In suburban America difference was the enemy and the key to victory against this domestic enemy was the influence and guidance of the American family and, by extension, the American school system.

Presley, as a star, offered youth in the 1950s an innovating Other to imitate who, in turn, presented a lifestyle that was in stark contrast to their everyday lives. While Presley’s lifestyle was tolerable on stage far removed from everyday reality, when youth began imitating him and his image concern arose. “If it seems too dramatic to speak of this music in terms of white parents’ struggle for the hearts and minds of their children, it requires no license to speak of its direct and overt challenge to the Victorian value system within which the older generation rooted their authority as adults and sometimes parents.” The fear voiced by parents, schools, and other members of their communities made Presley’s image and imitating his image more appealing to teenagers wanting to rebel and confirmed his image’s direct conflict with current social standards and social institutions and stood in defiance to the status quo. According to Christopher R. Martin, “Elvis Presley, with his 1956 national debut, was the chief cultural site for this type of youthful expression.”

Imitation of Presley’s image, particularly his hair, stood as a visual reminder to parents that their children were not pleased with the society and their place in it.

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243 Medovoi, pg. 19  
244 Linden pg. 53  
245 Martin pg. 53
Presley’s hair and style offered youth the ability to form new social orders through imitation and emulation. In an attempt to curtail this hairdo which was viewed as promoting juvenile delinquency and other anti-social behaviors, schools and reform schools attempted to ban Presley’s hairdo on male students and, in the case of reform schools, cut students’ hair to begin with a clean slate. It was only with this clean slate, and a sheared head, that society and schools believed that a boy could become a functioning member of society.

Several students took their hairdos to court. In November 1956 Robert Phernetton took his case to Judge Alton H. Noe. Phernetton had been told that the ‘Elvis’ hairdo was banned and not to return to school until he had cut his hair to a more socially acceptable one and he and his parents were requesting that the court force the school to allow him to attend classes long hair or not. Judge Noe was not amused and ruled in favor of the school. Phernetton relented several weeks later.246

Bans like the one imposed on Phernetton were not uncommon. Students were benched during sporting events and even subjected to in-school haircuts by teachers.247 Hairstyle was also suggested as an indicator of potential future deviance. In addition to using the word ‘ain’t,’ The National Education Association’s delinquency project advised “school principals and teachers to watch for the following characteristics:

247 *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1954
Those with parents who do not belong to organized groups such as parent-teacher associations, women’s clubs, the Elks, Lions, Redmen or other lodges.

Those who do poorly in school, miss classes often, show no respect for public property and who are more concerned with ‘being’ than ‘becoming.’

Those with male kin who are tattooed.

Those who dress sharply, ‘hip’ and ‘jazzy’ and affect ‘offbeat haircuts.’

According to the National Education Association, students that met these criteria were more likely to become juvenile delinquents and their hair was one way to spot them. Nice, law abiding boys did not use the word ‘ain’t.’ Nice, law abiding boys did not have relatives who had tattoos. Nice, law abiding boys did not wear their hair like Elvis. Nice, law abiding boys were not sent to juvenile correction institutions like Training Schools and it would not be hard to imagine the boys who ended up there for committing any range of crimes to be sporting sinister hairdos like Presley’s. “To me it [the hairstyle] is an indication on the part of young people that they have independence and are breaking with adults.” The Institute could not “permit that sort of thing.”

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248 New York Times, February 11, 1959
249 Chicago Daily Tribune, November 27, 1956
hair, discipline, and stripping the young man or boy of his individuality appeared to be the way to combat this dissent.

Presley’s hair and style offered youth the ability to form new social orders through imitation. Many young men performed a masculinized bad-boy identity that was constructed in direct opposition to the masculinity prized by the American family’s idea of father, while young girls performed a feminized version of delinquency that was an answer to and in support of the bad-boy image presented by their male counterparts. “If domesticity finds its binary opposite in wildness, then certainly there were moments in the 1950s when wildness was preferable, [as can be seen] in delinquents inhabiting the ‘blackboard jungle,’” or even in the “wild” antisuburban energies of rock ‘n’ roll.”

Movies like Rebel without a Cause showcased the lifestyle and glamorized behavior of male deviance. James Dean was all rebel, from his hair, to his motorcycle, to his boots. These images were countered with fear and it was this fear that confirmed the images’ ability to stand in opposition to current social expectations.

According to James Gilbert, the fear of deviance and deviant youth in Cold War America was directly related to the Second World War.

The [Second World] war rendered the extremes of human depravity commonplace. Propaganda, mass society, atomic warfare, communism, fascism, became words infused with immediate and urgent content. Youth more than

250 Medovoi, pg. 171
adults bore the imprint of these changes. They were the harbingers of a new society, and adults were prepared to punish the messengers so much did they wish to avoid the message that the family was rapidly changing, that affluence was undercutting old mores, that working women were altering the sexual politics of the home and workplace, and that the media were transforming American culture into a homogenized mass that disguised local distinctions and prepared the way for a new sort of social order.\textsuperscript{251}

New social order has always been brought about through imitation and, through imitation; this new social order has never truly been new, but simply a continuance of the actions of previous generations. Parents of the 1950s imitated idols when they were younger too by following different styles that had become socially acceptable by the time they became parent.

However, when the parents of the 1950s looked at their children they saw strangers. The boys had long hair and wore sloppy clothes, not at all in line with the neat and tidy appearance their parents’ wanted them to have. The girls were changed into wild, panting, sobbing animals at the mere mention of a male celebrity’s name and these celebrities were not doing anything to help them rein their children in and set them on a proper path. Celebrities like Presley seemed to only fuel the fire. “Rock ‘n’ roll, the psychiatrists tell us ex-teenagers, is a means of the youngster expressing his or her revolt against authority. Elvis Presley, his defiant sideburns and his belting singing style, are a symbol of teen-agers’ resentment and their frustration at having to mark time until they

\textsuperscript{251} Gilbert pg. 41
grow up.” As harmless as that may seem, Presley’s sideburns and clothes, his image, were visual cues of defiance and deviance and the imitation of Presley’s style and image was read by adults as a rejection of authority in 1950s America. Also known as a ducktail, Presley’s hairstyle was called “sinister,” giving Presley’s hair and the image of his hair more power to cause damage and threaten than the singer himself.

6.4 The Perceived Danger of Rock ‘n’ Roll
Adult concern about Presley, and the sway he held over the youth of America, took on a more ominous tone with the newspaper coverage of two incidents that occurred in late 1956 and early 1957. In October 1956, two girls, Carol Church, 16, and Jean DeGuibert, 12, disappeared from their homes in Washington, DC. The article speculated that they had runaway to Memphis in the hopes that they could meet Presley. The article focused on the fact that they girls were Presley fans and even reported that the girls owned at least 46 Presley albums. Their love for Presley was the thing that took them away from the safety of their homes.

Two months after Church and DeGuibert disappeared two Chicago sisters, Barbara and Patricia Grimes, 16 and 13 years old, went missing after seeing an Elvis Presley movie. The story quickly made the newspapers in Chicago and even Presley publicly

252 Chicago Daily Tribune, February 3, 1957
253 New York Times, June 2, 1957
254 Washington Post and Times Herald, October 4, 1956
pled with the girls to return home saying, “If you are good Presley fans, you’ll go home and ease your mother’s worries.”

255 Shaffer pg. 1
Figure 29: A mother’s nightmare

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256 Photo by Bob Kotalik, Chicago Sun Times photographer
Loretta Grimes, Barbara and Patricia’s mother, prays at one of her daughter’s beds under the ever-present image of Elvis Presley.
http://www.suntimes.com/realchicago/1950s/27.html
The girls never returned home. Their bodies were found a month later.257 Follow up news articles reported that an illiterate drifter, Edward (Bennie) Bedwell, and an acquaintance, met the girls in a bar and held and raped the sisters for seven days until the sisters fought back. The men then beat the girls, knocked them unconscious, and dumped them alongside a country road. The coroner’s report said the girls had been alive when they were dumped and slowly died of exposure.

Along with the gory details, the article claimed Bedwell bore a striking resemblance to Presley and even wore his hair in a similar manner.258 In this situation, again, love for Presley put his female teenage fans in danger, this time mortal danger, and, as the article suggests, may have made it easier for the killer to contact his victims.259 Presley’s own image, that had originally helped catapult him to fame, was being viewed as deviant, anti-social, and dangerous.

Prior to being drafted, Presley himself was doing little to improve his image and was involved in several physical altercations that made newspapers across the country. He was involved in a bar fight with a Marine who accused Presley of pulling a gun on him.260 Later articles said the gun had been a prop from a movie Presley had been working on but did not explain why the star had carried it off the set and into a bar.261

257 Washington Post and Times Herald, January 23, 1957
258 Washington Post and Times Herald, January 28, 1957
259 Bedwell confessed and recanted three times in the Grimes case. The case currently remains unsolved.
260 New York Times, March 25, 1957
261 New York Times, March 25, 1957
On October 18, 1956, Presley was involved in another fist fight with a gas station manager. Female fans surrounded Presley while he was at the service station and business at the station was brought to a halt by the large number of fans. The owner asked Presley to leave so his station could return to normal, but Presley was held up signing autographs and the confrontation escalated into a fight between Presley and the station owner. The October 19 article in the *New York Times* depended mainly on quotes from the station manager, Edd Hopper, and suggested that Presley had started the fight. The *Washington Post and Times Herald* article of the same date did not place blame for the fight with either man, but called the fight a “battle” and showed Presley as a haughty, conceited rock ‘n’ roll star run wild. When “asked his name by the arresting officer, Presley quipped: ‘Well, maybe you’d better put down Carl Perkins.’ (His principle competitor in the Rock ‘n’ Roll record field.)” Presley and his image were out of control.

6.5 Money = Power

Teenagers in the 1950s were an economic force to be reckoned with and American producers created products specifically to meet the desires of this new market. Many teenagers who held jobs no longer needed to use their paychecks to support their families and looked for ways to spend their disposable income. Rock ‘n’ roll was an intensely popular commodity in the 1950s. In his work on the significance of rock ‘n’

262 *New York Times*, October 19, 1956
roll, Glenn Altschuler discussed how economic changes, the baby boom, and racial boundaries being blurred, especially by youth, presented the conditions necessary for the birth of rock ‘n’ roll. Rock ‘n’ roll traces its musical roots to white hillbilly and country music and black rhythm and blues. Early rock ‘n’ roll musicians and records commercial success among the white majority depended on blending these divergent musical influences in a way that favored white hillbilly and country music.

White musicians like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Gene Vincent pushed the envelope and played rock ‘n’ roll in a way that favored black rhythm and blues dealt with a backlash from American parents, many of whom viewed rock ‘n’ roll as a threat to the status quo. The blurred racial lines were most concerning. White teenagers were beginning to listen to music, like rock ‘n’ roll, that was heavily influenced by black music and musicians and this music was easily accessible on the radio and in white only stores. Of most concern was the blurred racial lines. According to Altschuler, in public spaces, like schools and streets, racial lines were still firmly in place. However, private settings, which Altschuler includes dancehalls and concert spaces in his definition, and in spaces previously inhabited with only blacks, such as African American only dancehalls and concert venues, were now seeing more white youth. Altschuler quotes Carl Perkins remembering Chuck Berry saying to him, “[y]ou know, Carl, we might be doing as much with our music as our leaders are in Washington to bring down

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263 Altschuler
Rock ‘n’ roll, with its roots in black music brought together American teenagers of many different racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds and its success was made possible through the changing teenage economy.

These racial changes, when combined with economic changes allowed for more personal spending. “In earlier generations, working children turned their paychecks over to their parents. In the more affluent postwar period, Mom and Dad made no such claim on their earnings. The weekly disposable income of teenagers varied with age. Boys had on average $4.16 at age thirteen, $8.26 at sixteen, and $16.95 at eighteen; girls’ incomes were two or three dollars less.” During the 1950s teenagers spent about $10 billion of their own money. Additionally, the dramatic increase in the number of youth who were born during the post-war baby boom provided a market for rock ‘n’ roll and customers with the means to purchase it and this was evident in Presley’s record sales. “In 1956 alone Elvis Presley sold 10 million records (out of the industry’s total of 90 million) and claimed 50 percent of RCA’s pop music sales.”

Presley’s whirlwind tour of state fairs and small theaters early in his career got his image and stage performances in front of thousands of rock ‘n’ roll fans. Though other musicians had laid the groundwork and even performed rock ‘n’ roll in a similar vein as

264 Altschuler pg. 41
265 Altschuler pg. 123
266 Altschuler pg. 123
267 Palladino pg. 129
Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Bill Haley & the Comets, Bo Diddley, and Gene Vincent, none experienced as much commercial success and as large of a legacy as Presley. Presley’s success was not limited to commercial success. “[Presley] brought a fresh look, a fresh attitude, and a fresh sound to popular music.” Recognition of Presley’s image was furthered through consumer goods that were created employing his image, like records, and magazines. American teenage boys sporting Presley’s hairdo solidified Presley’s image through the appreciation and act of emulation. This construction and marketing was not limited to rock ‘n’ roll.

The construction and marketing of identity began around the same time that the production and sale of sheet music began and was even employed to alter an artist’s identity in the hopes of selling more music. Offshoots of re-produced popular music were created, like jewelry, lunchboxes, and clothing all bolstered by the culture industry’s largest and most complex production, the celebrity. This was evident in the collectible explosion around Elvis Presley, which started in 1956 with an agreement between his manager and merchandiser Hank Saperstein. Elvis Presley, his image, his songs, and lyrics from his songs appeared on everything from the obvious records, buttons, and pins to dog tag bracelets, trading cards, and lipstick. It wasn’t just the items

268 Campbell & Brody pg. 107
that were being bought and sold, it was Elvis Presley himself. Presley’s image was created, sold, purchased, traded, bought, sold, and reproduced.

With the prosperity of the 1950s, the renegotiation of racial boundaries, and a widening divide between teenagers and their parents socially, culturally, and economically, also came fear. Mainstream America was constantly being told by the media and the government to be fearful of Communism, and of non-conformists of various kinds, and this fear was not limited to others, it also was directed toward American children. Popular cinema kept fear alive by making viewers suspicious of threats, even in their own homes.

Films that portrayed teens as a threat to society, such as 1958’s *The Party Crashers*, 1955’s *Blackboard Jungle*, and 1955’s *Rebel Without a Cause* portrayed anti-social behavior such as sex, violence, and drug use by teenagers and showed parents that Communism was not the only thing out to ensnare their children.\(^{269}\) According to Medovoi “a so-called bad boy boom took place” in the latter half of the twentieth century. “[T]he [mid-century] teenage crime wave was rehearsed in books, magazines, and congressional hearings” through the Cold War.\(^{270}\) Both bad boys and girls had a desire for something different from a “domesticated or organizational future.”\(^{271}\)

\(^{269}\) Medovoi  
\(^{270}\) Hoberman pg. 285  
\(^{271}\) Medovoi pg. 48
future was in direct opposition to their parents’ way of life, what was believed to be the American way of life at the time, and the safety and security of citizens. “[J]udging from contemporary expressions of concerns from parents, public officials, and the media they were perceived as an authentic threat to the social order.”\textsuperscript{272} According to Grace Palladino, “[t]eenagers were supposed to inhabit a largely symbolic world, and they were supposed to find satisfaction in superficial tasks that mimicked adult reality – at least that was what movies, magazines, and radio programs had been telling them [in the 1940s].”\textsuperscript{273} This was not enough. Teenagers acted out against the social and cultural norms that were ascribed to them in the 1950s and rock ‘n’ roll was the soundtrack for their dissent.

6.6 Drafting Elvis Presley
Presley’s possible draft was met with an outcry from both critics and fans alike. This outcry was chronicled in newspapers and letters to the Draft Board and President Eisenhower and even has a presence in Presley’s Official Military Personnel Files at the National Archives. Elvis Presley received his draft questionnaire in October 1956 and the news of Presley’s draft made newspapers several weeks later.\textsuperscript{274} On January 4, 1957, Presley reported to the Kennedy Veteran’s Hospital examination center for a private pre-draft physical.\textsuperscript{275} There were no other potential draftees at the examination center when

\textsuperscript{272} Doherty pg. 93
\textsuperscript{273} Palladino pg. 63-64
\textsuperscript{274} Los Angeles Times, October 24, 1956 and The Sun, October 25, 1956
\textsuperscript{275} Chicago Daily Tribune, January 5, 1957
he went through his physical. Immediately there were questions about his physical being done privately.

Not everyone was pleased with this arrangement, writing from the Hines VA Hospital in Chicago, a Chicago Daily Tribune reader identified as E.B. said, “The thought of the army’s playing footsie with Elvis would make a buzzard sick to his stomach.” E.B. maintained that Presley would not be a real soldier and would add a comical theatricality to the military that was contrary to how he believed soldiers who had lost their lives in battle should be remembered.\textsuperscript{276} If the Army could transform him into a real soldier and not allow his presence to turn maneuvers into a farce, the Army would have won a decisive public relations victory. But that would not be before a full-tilt media circus. E.B.’s full message expressed his opinion and suggested that other men with him thought the same.

Twelve of us in this ward at Hines [Veteran’s Affairs] hospital have just read that the army gave Elvis Presley a “private pre-induction physical examination.” How Divine!

Of course, he hasn’t been classified yet. Let’s assume he will be 1-A {tho that is a stretching the imagination pretty far.} How about the Army’s completing the farce? Why not have President Eisenhower administer the oath on the steps of the White House, while an army band plays 16 choruses of “Hound Dog”? All televised coast to coast – in color. Then the chief of staff could measure him for a uniform while 24 blondes from Hollywood do the dance of the flowers on the

\textsuperscript{276} Chicago Daily Tribune, January 13, 1957
lawn. Let’s set the ceremony for Memorial Day. That would take our minds off the white crosses all over the world where real soldiers gave their all.

The thought of the army’s playing footsie with Elvis would make a buzzard sick to his stomach.

- E.B.277

The images that were released from Presley’s pre-induction physical did little to help discourage the impression that Presley was receiving preferential treatment. Glamorous photos of Presley and his girlfriend-du-jour, a Las Vegas showgirl, were splashed across newspapers through the country.

277 Chicago Daily Tribune, January 13, 1957
“HE’S A FINE PHYSICAL SPECIMEN,” commented dancer Dotty Harmony before singer Elvis Presley reported for his Army pre-induction physical exam at Memphis. The Army agreed with her and passed the rock-'n'-roll artist.

Figure 30: Presley and his girlfriend-du-jour, Dotty Harmony, outside the Kennedy Veterans Hospital examination center.

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278 Daily Boston Globe, January 5, 1957
Capt. L. T. Clemmons, chief of the examination station, attempted to quell suspicions of preferential treatment. According to Capt. Clemmons, the Army “called [Presley] on what normally is an off day at the station” because “called him on what normally is an off day at the station.” “We were alerted for this two days ago,” said Capt. L. T. Clemmons, chief of the examination station. “We’ve tried to lay out a routine. Things can get a bit confused when a celebrity is called for one of these examinations.” “He was the only prospective draftee taking the test, which led off with an hour-long written aptitude examination.” This was only the beginning of concerns of preferential treatment and these concerns will be discussed further in section 5.7.

Though the *Boston Daily Globe* reported that possibility of Presley being called for the draft was “remote” many fans were still concerned that Uncle Sam may take Presley away. A 15-year-old girl in Honolulu, HI sent a letter to military officials in Memphis pleading, “Please, please, please don’t draft Elvis Presley!...not only for his or my welfare, but for the Army’s as well...Letters will jam up the mailing system...the WACs will start riots wherever he shows up...The Army will never be the same.” The idea that the Army should not draft Presley out of concern of rioting female soldiers is
laughable, but pleas like this were not always the most logically sound, a trait shared with much of the correspondence from Presley’s detractors as well.\textsuperscript{283}

Even Presley’s contributions to the nation’s entertainment and to the Internal Revenue Service were offered up as reasons that Presley should not be inducted. Fans even appealed to Mamie Eisenhower to intervein on Presley’s behalf:

Sacramento, California
4-10-58

Dear Mamie –

Will you please please be so sweet and kind as to ask I like to please bring Elvis Presley back to us from the army. We need him in our entertainment world to make us all laugh. The theaters need him to help fill their many empty seats these days of T.V. He Elvis is the leading box office attraction. Also, did you know Elvis has been paying $500,000 in income taxes. We feel the huge taxes he is been paying could help our defense effort for more than his stay in the army. Please ask Mike to bring Elvis back to us soon. We wish I could pass along real soon to exempt all entertainers who pay large sums of income taxes. Thanking you for being the sweet gracious lady you are and asking God to bless you and Ike in every way every day we are

Gratefully Yours,
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Erickson
5741-62nd St.\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{283} Letters from Presley’s detractors will be discussed in section 6.8.
\textsuperscript{284} Letter from Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Erickson to Mamie Eisenhower.

Elvis Aron Presley Official Military Personnel Files, National Archives
The reference to concerns about lost income taxes was also mentioned during Joe Louis’ service.

\textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, March 25, 1958
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Erickson were not the only ones concerned about the loss of Presley’s taxes and attempted to use this loss of income tax as a reason not to induct Presley. In January 1958, Washington Post and Times Herald journalist, Bill Gold, asked readers to write in about their impressions of Presley possibly being inducted. The response was overwhelmingly negative and stated that Presley was not important and should stick to music. Shortly after the initial article ran, Gold published another article including letters he had received after his first article had gone to print. These letters were supportive of Presley, but the readers also did not want to see him inducted. One reader, Mary Flanagan, even took issue with the idea that Presley was not important. “When Elvis goes into the Army, the United States will lose about a half million dollars in income taxes. If he’s not important, I don’t know who is.”

During this same time, the Memphis Draft Board was so bogged down by correspondence and phone calls regarding Presley’s draft that the Chairman of the Memphis Draft Board, Milton Bowers, Sr. released the following statement:

With all due respect to Elvis, who’s a nice boy, we’ve drafted people who are far, far more important than he is. After all, when you take him out of the

entertainment business what have you got left? A truck driver. I talk Elvis Presley more than I sleep. A crackpot called me out of bed last night and complained that we didn’t put Beethoven in the Army. Considering that Beethoven was not an American and has been dead for some time, I suppose he felt we were discriminating against rock-n-roll music. I told him we put Mr. Eisenhower in the Army and that ought to count for something. Then I asked him how old he was and when he told me he was 52, I asked him how he got so stupid in 52 years.  

Mr. Bowers’ frustration was understandable in a time where people simply looked up his home phone number and called his house at all hours regarding his business, but President Eisenhower received far worse letters. In late April 1958, “White House officials said…President Eisenhower [had] received a ‘threatening letter’ from a 14-year-old girl who doesn’t want rock-and-roll singer Elvis Presley inducted into the Army.” The letter stated, “If I lived in Washington, I would kill you for taking my Elvis Presley into the service. Don’t you realize he could be killed if there’s a war?” As was to be expected, this girl did not get the reaction that she wanted, though it was pointed out that she was not a girl who was known for following rules when the Chicago Daily Tribune reported that “[t]he girl was under detention for truancy at the time she wrote the letter”

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Beethoven, really???

287 Daily Boston Globe, March 1, 1958 and The Sun, March 1, 1958

288 Chicago Daily Tribune, February 28, 1958
and that “[s]he was let off with a warning that severe action would be taken if she ever wrote another such letter.”

Presley fans even implored the Army not to cut Presley’s signature hair. Presley’s hair was so entwined with his celebrity identity that cutting it would almost tantamount to robbing him of his power a la Samson and Delilah. A representative from the Army reassured fans by saying, “Relax, girls. Chances are, Elvis Presley will be permitted to keep his long hair even if he is drafted. An Army spokesman said Presley, who took his pre-induction physical examination yesterday, probably would go into the Special Services branch and could forego the G.I. haircut required of the ordinary soldier. The Special Services branch is made up of well-known entertainers, athletes, and the like.”

He was correct, if Presley went into Special Services, like Joe Louis did, the requirements for him as a soldier would have been different than requirements for soldiers serving in the regular Army.

The *Daily Boston Globe* also asked current active duty servicemen their impressions of Presley’s impending induction. Overall, the responses were fairly positive. SGT 1c Robert Anson said, “Presley’s problem is to get along with the Army – we’re not going to worry about getting along with him.” SGT John Cravens said, “It would just be the same as if President Eisenhower was transferred to our unit. If he gives the impression he is doing his job, there’ll be no trouble.” While not enthusiastic about

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289 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 28, 1958
290 *The Sun*, January 6, 1957
possibly having Presley signed to his unit, Sp3 Curtis D. McFaul went a step further and added a dig at Presley, “I’d just as soon have him come over after I leave. He’d better stay out of my barracks when he sings.”

Presley’s draft was announced in newspapers across the country on December 21, 1957. Paramount immediately requested a deferment for Presley to film *King Creole.* This request was followed up by a letter from Presley. “He wrote the board he was acting not in his own interest but in behalf of Paramount Studios. His request came a day after the Memphis board received a plea from Paramount for a two-month deferment for the singer. The studio said it planned to start work on Mr. Presley’s new picture January 13 and cancellation would cost it $350,000 in ‘preparatory investments.’” The Memphis draft board considered the “hardship” deferment and it was granted on December 27, 1957. Presley’s deferment compounded the concerns of preferential treatment and was cited as the reason that H. Nick Johnson, “a 45-year-old Purple Heart veteran of World War II resigned from the [Harlan, KY] draft board [January 2, 1958] after the rock in roll singer was deferred for 60 days by in Memphis Tenn. draft board so he could complete work on the motion picture. Johnson said he resigned because he

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291 *Daily Boston Globe,* July 20, 1958  
292 *The Sun,* December 21, 1957  
294 *New York Times,* December 25, 1957  
could not refuse deferments two residents of this mountain town in Western Kentucky well Presley had been deferred.”

It was evident from this point forward the Army would need to take conscious steps to ensure that Presley was treated like any other soldier for as far as his celebrity image would allow.

6.7 Elvis Presley in the Army – US53310761

Elvis Presley was inducted into the United States Army on March 24, 1958.

According to author Alanna Nash, Colonel Tom Parker, Presley’s manager for most of his career, was the driving force behind Presley’s draft and induction. In her biography of Colonel Tom Parker, The Colonel: The Extraordinary Story of Colonel Tom Parker and Elvis Presley, Nash claims that Parker orchestrated Presley’s draft and the circumstances surrounding it like a puppeteer manipulating a marionette. Though, these claims are questionable and I have not found any evidence to support Nash’s claims they are documented here to simply recognize one of the theories surrounding Presley’s draft that have been presented in previous accounts of his military service.

Nash claims the following: knowing that Presley would be eligible for the draft (though not having received any confirmation that he would actually be drafted), Parker began writing the Pentagon in the summer of 1956 requesting that Presley be drafted into the Special Services division, the entertainment arm of the military where Presley would continue being a singer, perform for thousands of troops, and not be required to succumb

297 Lawrence Laurent wrote that Colonel Tom Parker is as much a Colonel “as I am a maharajah.” Washington Post and Times Herald, December 26, 1957
to the regulation GI haircut. Parker then leaked information to *Billboard* claiming
Presley’s draft date as December 1957 (though no word had been received from the draft board) and stating that he would be drafted into the Special Services.²⁹⁸

When Presley was drafted in December 1957, Parker instructed him to turn down the Special Services appointment in favor of being a regular soldier. If accurately presented by Nash, Parker’s plan was brilliant. In the late 1950’s “a big star who shirked his [military] duty had hell to pay.”²⁹⁹ In the eyes of the American public, who had been kept in the dark about the potential wheeling and dealing of Colonel Tom Parker, Presley had been offered the perfect opportunity to continue being a rock ‘n’ roll star and, instead, chose to serve as an ordinary soldier. According to journalist, Alan Levy:

While other rock ’n’ roll stars were vilified, Presley the private was portrayed as a patriot. In interviews he played his part well. Expressing gratitude for “what this country has given me,” Elvis told a Memphis Press-Scimitar reporter that he was “ready to return a little. It’s the only adult way to look at it.” After having worked in a factory, in a defense plant, and as a truck driver, he told columnist Vernon Scott, he was not worried about manual labor in the army: “I’ll do whatever they tell me, and I won’t be asking no special favors.” Elvis acknowledged that his military service would be hard on his parents, especially his mother, who was “no different from millions of other mothers who hated to see their sons go.” When he showed up at the induction station on March 24, 1958, to be examined, weighed, and deemed fit to serve, with Life magazine cameras clicking away, Elvis stuck to the script. “If I seem nervous, it’s because I am,” he said. But he looked forward to a “great experience. The army can do anything it wants with me. Millions of other guys have been drafted, and I don’t want to be different from anyone else.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Levy pg. 6  
²⁹⁹ Nash pg. 174  
³⁰⁰ Altschuler pg. 128
Presley and his fellow inductees were followed by the media and Presley fans along the bus ride from Memphis, TN to Fort Chaffee, AR. Though Presley’s initial physical to determine his fitness for duty was conducted privately, his physical on the day of his induction, March 24, 1958, saw the media being given “free rein by the hospital” to record the event.\textsuperscript{301} According to Alan Levy, Captain Arlie Metheny, Fort Chaffee’s Principal Information Officer, outlined the Army and Fort Chaffee’s role in the media spectacle that was Presley’s arrival and included 3 days of “nearly seventy newsmen, photographers, and cameramen.”\textsuperscript{302} This attention was beyond compare. The Army even reassigned a horde of public affairs officers to deal with the media attention. The Army even released an extensive fact sheet covering Presley’s induction, basic training, and duty assignment.

**FACT SHEET**

**PRIVATE ELVIS PRESLEY, US 53 310 761**

1. Private Elvis Presley, US 53 310 761, was inducted into the United States Army at Memphis, Tennessee on 23 March 1958. In accordance with normal flow plan established by Department of the Army, he was moved to the United States Army Reception Station, Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, arriving thereat on 24 March 1958.

2. A. Reception Station processing was accomplished in the usual three-day period allotted for this purpose. During this processing, Private Presley was administered the Army Classification Battery of Tests, and achieved the following aptitude area scores:

\textsuperscript{301} Levy pg. 22
\textsuperscript{302} Levy pg. 56
B. Private Presley’s physical profile was determined to be 111 111, profile “A”.
3. A. Department of the Army is currently providing 8407 untrained enlisted personnel directly from Reception Stations to the 2nd Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas, for packet training for the 3rd Armored Division in Europe. The March 1958 requirement was 2973 enlisted men provided from Reception Stations located at Forts Dix, Jackson, Knox, Wood, Chaffee and Carson. Fort Chaffee was programed to provide 390 of this total. 303

4. On 26 March 1958, Fort Chaffee, Arkansas reported that of 57 persons processed, 19 met the requirements enumerated above. One of these was Private Elvis Presley who was reported as physical profile “A”, aptitude area General Technical (GT), score 108. This was the area considered by the classifier to be most appropriate to Private Presley.
5. Since a requirement existed for all 19 enlisted personnel reported by Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, all were selected for assignment to the 2d Armored Division. Instructions were issued accordingly with a movement date on or about 28 March 1958.
6. On 28 March 1958, Private Presley, with eighteen other enlisted personnel in a group movement, processed via bus transportation to Fort Hood, Texas to begin basic combat and advanced individual training with the 2d Armored Division. 304

Presley’s draft and military service achieved several things for both Presley and the military, first, his time in Germany separated Presley from the publicity surrounding the

303 Fact Sheet for Private Elvis Presley, US 53 310 761, March 1958
Official Military Personnel Files of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
Official Military Personnel Files of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
debauched lifestyle he was becoming accustomed to because the military limited media access to the rock ‘n’ roll star. In contrast to Joe Louis who served as a boxer in the Army’s Special Service’s division, Elvis Presley served as a regular soldier, a truck driver, and, as such, could not be used in the same way that he may have been used had he served as a singer. For example, Joe Louis lost out of hundreds of thousands of dollars in profit from boxing bouts and appearances that he could have earned for appearances that were part of his duty in the Special Services.

Because Presley served as a regular soldier he would continue profiting from sales of records and could have even performed in Europe while on leave. The limitations on how the Army could use a regular soldier verses a soldier serving in the Special Services division also extended to media coverage. The military and the security on base would shelter Presley from the unforgiving eye of the media. Only two press conferences were held during his military service and only photos taken by military photographers of Presley on duty and participating in field maneuvers that presented the rock ‘n’ roll idol as an ordinary grunt were released. The Army’s decision to treat Presley as a regular soldier was encouraged by public outcry of preferential treatment.

6.8 Concerns of Preferential Treatment
The Army and the U.S. Government was plagued by abnormal requests and accusations of preferential treatment during Presley’s service and responding to these requests and accusations was nearly a full-time job for some members of Army and the U.S. Government. The Army put much through into approving or denying these abnormal requests. On May 22, 1958, the Vice Chief of Staff for the Army, General L.
L. Lemnitzer, sent a memorandum to the Undersecretary of the Army with his recommendations regarding a request to have Private First Class Presley appear at a DJ conference in the United States.

Memorandum for: The Undersecretary of the Army

Subject: Request for Interview of PFC Elvis Presley

1. Reference is made to your memorandum of 14 May concerning a request that Private First Class Elvis Presley be flown to CONUS for a disc jockey convention in Miami.

2. As you know, Private First Class Presley has brought a great deal of favorable publicity to the Army. However, in the period immediately following his induction, there were numerous references on TV and radio comedy shows, in letters addressed to the Department of the Army, and letters to the editors in various newspapers alleging preferential treatment to Private First Class Presley. I am convinced that the present favorable public impression is the result of the impartial way he has been treated in and by the army and of his own desire to avoid any such efforts to commercialize pawn his military service. Private First Class Presley received his basic training and was classified and assigned as a scout driver in the 3rd Armored Division exactly as any other inductee. Since then, he has performed military duties in his MOS.

3. The public impression of a teenage idol conscientiously fulfilling his obligation as a good soldier in a combat unit is extremely beneficial not only from the recruiting viewpoint, but also because of its effect upon the discipline and morale among youthful inductees and enlistees, many of whom emulate Private First Class Presley. Any evidence of preferential or usual treatment in this time could, of course, impair this favorable impression.

4. Further, in the past the Army has consistently denied similar request. Thus, granting one such request in this instance could easily destroy the basis on which these numerous requests have been denied.

305 Continental United States
306 Military Occupational Specialty
5. Finally, Private First Class Presley’s own desires should be considered. Towards this end, I am informed that both he and his business manager are opposed to participating in this type of program during his military service.

6. In view of the foregoing, I recommend that the only deny this request.

L. L. Lemnitzer
General
United States Army Vice Chief of Staff

In this letter, it is important that Gen. Lemnitzer was clear to recognize the role of Presley as a teen idol and the importance of how his fans viewed Presley, noting that “many” of his fans may “emulate Private First Class Presley.” The Army recognized that the way Presley was treated had more lasting and far reaching implications for the Army than just dealing with a single man and his business manager.

This is even more evident in a series of communications from citizens regarding Presley’s service. Several of these letters have been preserved in the Official Military Personnel Files of Elvis Aron Presley housed at the National Archives. Many of these letters express concern of preferential treatment and even compared Presley’s service to the service of their own sons. These letters were sent to everyone from Senators to Congressmen to representatives of the Army to the President.

307 Memorandum for The Undersecretary of the Army from LL Lemnitzer May 22, 1959
Official Military Personnel Files of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
This first letter, in response to a letter sent to Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin, lacks specific allegations of preferential treatment, but is included in this case study to show the type of allegations that the Army became used to defending against.

Dear Senator Proxmire:

This letter is in reply to your recent inquiry in behalf of Mr. Lawrence Grubs, who has alleged special privileges in connection with the military service of Elvis Presley.

It is difficult to be responsive in the absence of specific allegations. I believe it pertinent to note, however, the Department of the Army policy precludes both favoritism and discrimination in the utilization of public figures such as athletes and entertainers with national reputations. And implementation of this policy, the Army has been hampered by extremes of both adulation and vituperation on the part of segments of the general public.

Private Presley was inducted into the military service by due process of law. He was trained in accordance with procedures applicable to all those who enter the Army for the first time, and he was assigned overseas against in military requirement for personnel of his military as distinguished from his civilian specialty.

During his training the Army disapproved many requests for his appearance at civic events. Counter to the desires of many of his fans, he has not been assigned to Special Services.

May I add that the utilization of private funds is a matter over which the Army has no jurisdiction; and that any servicemen who is dependents reside in Germany on the German economy[^308] is authorized to reside outside the military installation, provided residence does not interfere with his performance of his military duties.

Your interest in this matter is appreciated.

[^308]: Off base
Sincerely,

L.M. Johnson, Jr.
Lieutenant Colonel, CS
Office, Chief of Legislative Liaison

Col. Johnson’s response to Senator Proxmire gives a glimpse into the accusations that the Army must have been receiving regularly. “[In] the absence of specific allegations” Col. Johnson addressed the decision making behind Presley’s duty assignment in Germany, highlighted the rejection of requests for Presley to appear at civic events, and argued that Presley was within his right to live off base due to him having dependents living with him.

As Presley’s service neared its end, more complaints were received, and the complaints were personal. Parents were comparing their sons’ experiences in the Army to Presley’s and Presley’s rank and the date of his release from active duty service. The letter below from Mrs. Rose Phelan, mother of a soldier serving in Frankfurt, Germany was sent to Congressman Harold R. Collier of Illinois. Typos and grammatical errors appear as they did in the original letter to preserve the tone.

Another message with the same wording was sent by CG dodge brigadier general, CS the deputy chief of legislative liaison to Representative Albert H. Quie June 1, 1959
Official Military Personnel File of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
Dear Sir;-  

I cut out a clipping from the Chicago Evening American, Monday 27 1959. Article about Elvis Presley, being released early from Army, for “good behavior “tell me, is there any such thing as “good behavior “in the Army, if so I am sure my son should be able to get the same break, our son is stationed in Frankfurt Germany 9D Armored Division, same as this guy named Presley. And my son also has a job waiting for him, of course not as important as “Elvis” I am sure us poor people can do without his singing and rock and roll until he served his country like my son has to.  

My sons job is just as important, office job, class as important as Presley’s, and we parents needs his help, we aren’t lucky enough to have money enough to give our son a special car in Germany, and all the fine things that Presley has, so Presley gets the brakes about our sons, on good behavior, is that something.  

I am sure if I check this further, I will find out there is no such thing as good behavior, in the US Army.  

If I have been rude, please forgive me, but all of us mothers feel the same about our poor son, that has to get along on army pay and tax taken out. And then to read something like this, one who has plenty and don’t need the money. It must be he has a pull.  

Our son has been in the US Army one month longer than “Elvis” our son went in February 7, Elvis March.  

Yours truly,  

Rose Phelan  
301 N. Oak Park, Avenue  
Oak Park Illinois\textsuperscript{310}  

\textsuperscript{310} Message from Rose Phelan to Congressman Harold R. Collier July 1959  
Official Military Personnel Records of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
This letter is important because it displays how closely the American public was monitoring Presley’s service. Additionally, it shows how American parents compared the military experience and treatment of their sons with Presley’s experience and treatment. The Adjutant General of the United States, the Army’s chief administrative representative, sent the following letter in response to Congressman Collier’s inquiry.

Dear Mr. Collier:

I referred to your inquiry in behalf of Mrs. Rose Phelan concerning Elvis Presley.

Each person inducted in the Army is required by the universal military training and service act to serve 24 months. This act further provides that an individual may be released early under certain conditions, but he is not separated early because of good behavior. Good behavior is expected of all men in the Army.

An inductee serving overseas is generally returned so as to arrive in this country just prior to his normal release date. Situations such as early arrival of replacements overseas, inactivation of units, and availability of transportation may result in return of personnel ahead of schedule. If inductee is returned to the United States with less than three months left to serve, he is released rather than reassigned for a short period.

Elvis Presley will not be released in a manner different from any other inductee serving overseas.

I hope this information will be of assistance to you.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,
General Lee’s response is cold, impersonal, and in line with typical military responses, particularly to concerns of possibly preferential treatment received by Presley. This could be explained because General Lee was writing Congressman Collier and not Mrs. Phelan directly, but it may have had more to do with ensuring that the messages in responses to inquiries of this sort consistent.

Not even President Dwight D. Eisenhower was spared from the fray.

Sir President,

I am writing to you because something happened last week that I did not like my husband says I’m crazy to write to you because you will never see it, but I have nothing to lose except my time. I don’t want to complain but I would feel better if you could explain about what I don’t understand, and to me nobody knows more about this than you. Last week I saw on the paper that Sergeant Elvis

311 Message from RV Lee major general, USA the adjutant general to The Honorable Harold R. Collier, House of Representatives 20 August 1959
Message with identical wording sent by R. V Lee Major General, USA the Adjutant General to The Honorable Edna F. Kelly, House of Representatives 20 August 1959
Official Military Personnel Records of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
Presley was coming home, and what I don’t understand is he was drafted and in college and only two years in, and he come out as Sergeant, people say that it’s because he has money, Well I did not think that you could buy ranks, we have two sons one is 25 years old and the other is 14 years old, and the oldest boy first come out of the service January 6, 1960 he was in the Army and he enlisted for three years and went to El Paso Texas, Fort Bliss and went to school for 34 weeks he learned electronic on radar and guided missile and graduated one of the first, he was in El Paso almost 14 months and then he ship to Germany, He was there 18 months, and in Germany about a month before he come home, he went to NECO school there in case he would not find the job he wanted, he would reenlist and go to officers training school and make a career of it, and in the NCO school they had a class of 196 and my son came out the 36th, and he come out of the service as (Corporal,) And now my son got a job at Syracuse, New York in a General Electric plant, he is working on electric that’s what he wanted, if you could take time to answer this letter it would find my mind at peace, and you sir went to West Point and you know what NCO school is they call it little West Point. So you can see that my son is not afraid of hardship to better himself for the rest of his life, and if you ever come to Maine you will be very welcome, you remind me of my father,

Mrs. Robert Frotier
6 Shevenells Court
Biddeford, Maine

The letter was forwarded to General Lee and he responded to Mrs. Fortier in a similar manner to Congressman Collier.

Mrs. Robert Fortier
6 Shevenells Court
Biddeford, Maine

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312 Letter from Mrs. Robert Frotier to President Dwight D Eisenhower March 9, 1960
Official Military Personnel Records of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
Dear Mrs. Fortier:

Your letter to the president concerning the enlisted grade attained by your son as compared with that of Sergeant Elvis Presley was forwarded to the Department of the Army for consideration.

Army field commanders are authorized to promote enlisted personnel on the basis of leadership qualities, technical qualifications for military assignments, time in grade, time-in-service requirements and other criteria may be prescribed as necessary. The number of promotions authorized, however, depends on the number of vacancies to be filled in each command and appointments may not be made in excess of the establish ceiling in any individual unit.

Thus, the fact that your son did not attain as high an enlisted grade as did Sergeant Presley does not indicate that he received less consideration for promotion. Lack of a paygrade vacancy in his unit, as well as any of the other factors enumerated above, could have prevented his promotion to a higher grade.

Sincerely yours,

R. V. Lee
Major General, USA
The Adjutant General

These letters and responses are just a few examples of how closely the American public, both Presley fans and non-fans, was monitoring Presley’s service. The media intended to feed the desire for information about Presley while he was out of the public eye.

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313 Message from R. V Lee, Major General, USA, The Adjutant General to Mrs. Robert Fortier 23 March 1960
Official Military Personnel Records of Elvis Aron Presley, National Archives
6.9 Media During Presley’s Service

Prior to his service, Presley was a media staple and the media sought to continue the same track while he served his two years in the Army. The fact that Presley was taken out of the spotlight and only granted one interview during his time in the service, to *Stars and Stripes*, did not stop the media from claiming to have the inside scoop on everything related to Elvis and his military service and inventing facts and quotes when needed.

*Modern Screen*, a popular film magazine in the 1950s went so far as to run fabricated responses from Presley to fan mail in, “Pvt. Presley answers his private mail….from you.”

The answers, though not from Presley himself, were touched with a bit of sadness and loneliness and in line with what fans expected from their idol while serving. Eunice Francis from Kerrville, TX asked, “Dear Private Presley, Is it true that you are getting married soon to the girl whose picture you keep secretly in your wallet? Who is she?” The response: “No one. I heard this rumor myself. Don’t know how it started. The only girl I carry with me is – my mother. I’m not in love and I’m glad. I wouldn’t want to get a wife and leave her. I’m married to the Army for the duration.”

This response served several purposes, first, this kept Presley’s persona available to his fans, particularly his female fans. Secondly, it allowed fans to imagine a connection with his public persona and suggested a glimpse inside his private persona. Thirdly, it

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314 *Modern Screen*, September 1958
315 Col. Tom Parker should have been proud!
316 *Modern Screen*, September 1958
reiterated that Presley was dedicated to his service, to his fellow soldiers, to the Army, and to the United States of America.

Taking cue from fans’ interest in Presley’s service, a magazine called *Elvis in the Army* was printed by Ideal Magazine in 1959. The magazine consisted of photos of Presley before he left for Germany, boarding the boat to Germany, and photos from previous movies and television specials. It also included articles about “How He Has Changed as a Lover,” Why Elvis and I Couldn’t Marry” (presented as it was written by his girlfriend, Anita Wood), and an exposé about “Those Foreign Dating Parties.” This publication was intended for his fans and kept them up to date on what Presley was doing while he was away and presented him as an average soldier.\(^\text{317}\)

\(^{317}\) *Elvis in the Army*, 1959
Figure 31: Cover of *Elvis in the Army*[^1]

[^1]: Ideal Magazine, 1958
Other material culture was also created to keep Presley’s celebrity image alive and in it a transformation can be seen. According to Baudrillard, “[t]he trajectory of Elvis Presley’s career, from that of an obscure truck driver to international superstar, witnessed his manager and the record companies explore and exploit every medium, or semiological signifier – from the phonograph and the filmic image, to the live stage performances which responded to the desire of his fans for the real body of the star (the somatic) rather than the “simulacra and simulations” (Baudrillard) of his musical production.” While his management team and record company continued pumping out new music, hastily recorded before Presley went to Germany, other commodities were also created. Chief among these was the Elvis Presley Dog Tag Jewelry line.

Figure 32: Elvis Presley Dog Tag

319 Sewlall pg. 46
This product was marketed for female fans, came in both silver and gold tone, and was available in necklace, bracelet, anklet, key chain, and sweater pin form. The product allowed fans to carry a bit of Presley with them and expressed support of Presley and his service. The dog tags were a hit with fans. So much so that after the director of Jones Commercial High School in Chicago banned their wearing within the school female members of the student body protested outside the school.\textsuperscript{320}

Presley’s service was also a key marketing tool when it came to the records released during his service. Several prominently featured Presley in his uniform, always alone, and looking into the camera as if beckoning his fans, his female fans, that is, to continue their support and allow them to image themselves in the negative space beside him. Presley was doing his duty. Their duty was to support him…and buy his products.

\textsuperscript{320} Chicago Daily Tribune, August 1, 1958 and Chicago Daily Tribune, August 2, 1958
Figure 33: *A Date with Elvis* (1959).

6.10 Fans’ Impressions of Presley’s Service

Fan’s curiosity about Presley did not wane once Uncle Sam whisked him out of the public eye and fans wanted to know about all aspects of Presley’s life. *Modern Screen*’s September 1958 issue included a section called “Private Presley Answers his
Private Mail…From You.” This section featured questions from Presley fans and answers purportedly from Presley himself. There is no evidence that any of these responses were written by Presley or anyone associated with Presley, but that does not matter. The responses are still being presented as Presley and contributed in shaping the discourse surrounding his service in much the same way that Presley records and other commodities released during his service did. The images and stories released showed Presley and the military in a romanticized light, never in danger and always looking every bit the celebrity. In general, the questions were cliched and innocent. For example:

Dear Elvis,
Have you changed much physically? Are you getting enough to eat? Do you like Army chow? Is there anything you need that we can send you?
- L. P., St. Joseph, Missouri

I dropped a few pounds of weight – but toughened up during my eight weeks of basic. I’ve acquired a good healthy tan, also a lot of muscle. I never felt better. Army chow is fine. Not like Mom’s, of course – but no complaints. And I’ve been sent more ‘treats’ that the whole barracks can eat…cookies, candy, cake, cake – and even lemon pies kept fresh in dry ice. And you know me. I can eat a whole lemon pie in fifteen minutes. I love them.

321 Modern Screen, September 1958 pg. 26-27 & 70-71
322 Modern Screen, September 1958 pg. 26
Questions about ‘Army chow,’ gifts of ‘cookies, candy, cake, cake – and even lemon pies’ make boot camp seem more like summer camp and, in a way, that is how the media and Colonel Tom Parker’s portrayal of Presley’s service read to the American population. Presley was presented as taking a short slightly uncomfortable vacation from singing.

Fans were also concerned about the possibility that their icon might be the target of retaliation because of his fame. Additionally, fans felt beholden to Presley and, as is shown in the letter below, offered to assist Presley if anyone in the Army was giving him a hard time.

Dear Private Presley,

My Daddy tells me the Army is going to make it real hard for you because you are famous. Daddy served with Glenn Ford in the Marines and says Mr. Ford was kept on latrine duty and assigned other difficult jobs to prove he was not privileged? Are they treating you bad? If they are, I’ll fix them good.

-Elinore Stevens, Los Angeles, CA

In the Army, I’m just another trainee, just another guy. Sure I did KP, stood guard, went through combat training in the field, made the fifteen-mile hike with sixty-five pounds on my back – but so did all the other fellows. The officers are strict, but fair. They have a job to do and won’t stand for nonsense. And I’m flexible. I expected to conform. I’ve never been accustomed to things real easy. If I make it hard, the only one it’s going to be hard on is me. I certainly don’t mind hard work. I’ve done plenty of it before this. I worked as a laborer, up at three every morning working in a defense plant. When I was in high school I’d get out at 3:30 and be on the job at 6:30 for $12.50 a week ushering. And I’d be
up at dawn every morning to complete my homework. This is nothing to me. I can always make out.  

Even though there is no proof that Presley personally wrote any of these responses, they most likely came from Presley’s manager or at least his manager’s office. The response above presents Presley as an earnest hardworking man who knows that the hard work that he has put into jobs prior to his induction, like working at a theater and his singing career. It also presents him as a gracious and willing service member.

This section also provided an outlet to explain how things would need to change while Presley was in the service, like how responses to fan letters would either be delayed or would not be written at all because of Presley’s military duties.

Dear Elvis,
I met you when you were down here making King Creole and you told me to write you when you went into the Army. I did. Five times. But I never got an answer. Don’t they give you your mail there or is it just that you don’t care about your fans anymore?
-Liliayne Duanne, New Orleans, LA

Hon, I love my fans – and I miss them. I just hope they won’t blame me for the Army regulations which at times force me to ignore them. About my mail – several thousand letters arrive here each week. Getting those letters were really great…and I did try to acknowledge some of the mail and packages. Only it’s

323 Modern Screen, September 1958 pg. 70
impossible to write or call everyone. The other fellows wait on long lines here to speak for a few minutes to their mothers and sisters and wives – and I don’t want any special privileges. But getting all those letters are great for morale. I’d be miserable if they stopped coming. That’s why I humbly hope that although I can’t promise answers – you, and the rest of my fans will understand that I’m not deliberately neglecting you, nor appreciating your loyalty any the less. Luv ya…

Again, it is of little consequence that it cannot be proven that these letters came directly from Presley or even from Presley’s manager’s office. After all, the media benefitted just as much from Presley’s celebrity monetarily.

6.11 Transformation

Presley’s 18-month military service allowed for symbiotic transformation of both Presley through the military and, to a lesser extent, the military through Presley. Presley needed the military to transform or reform his image from the out of control, law breaking, hip shaking, riot inducing rock ‘n’ roll boy to an upstanding American man.

The military needed Presley to do much the same. When the parents of the 1950’s looked at their children they saw strangers. As discussed previously, the boys had long hair and wore sloppy clothes. The girls were changed into wild, panting, sobbing animals at the mere mention of a male celebrity’s name. And the celebrities were not doing anything to help them rein their children in. In fact, celebrities, like Presley, seemed to only fuel the fire. “Rock ‘n’ roll, the psychiatrists tell us ex-teenagers, is a means of the youngster expressing his or her revolt against authority. Elvis Presley, his defiant

324 Modern Screen, September 1958 pg. 71
sideburns and his belting singing style, are a symbol of teen-agers’ resentment and their frustration at having to mark time until they grow up.”

On the other side of the coin, Colonel Tom Parker intended to show America that Presley was a patriotic, hardworking, and, above all, a good boy. Many of the images released by both the military and Parker always showed Presley in uniform alone or with other soldiers. Photos and images of Presley in uniform were visual and unconscious ways of reminding a sometimes-critical public that Presley was a man that stepped up to the plate and was doing his duty.

In October 1958, Photoplay Magazine ran a story on Presley’s leaving for his military service. The story was written in a third person omniscient narrative style and discussed Presley’s thoughts on feelings on the eve of leaving for Germany. It also went into detail about Presley’s time in boot camp and, even if it wasn’t written by Presley himself, it did go into enough detail that the reader came away with a better understanding of Presley the soldier. Above all the article claimed that Presley was a normal soldier who would wake at the sound of reveille, rush to the mess hall for chow, spend his day learning about tanks, and spend his evening in his bunk with his fellow

\[\text{325} \text{ Chicago Daily Tribune, February 3, 1957} \]
\[\text{326} \text{ Photos of Elvis with fans and more questionable photos of Elvis with showgirls at the Moulin Rouge club in Munich have been published in the years since his death, but none were officially released by either the military or Colonel Tom Parker. Schröer pg. 83-87} \]
\[\text{327} \text{ Photoplay Magazine, October 1958} \]
soldiers cleaning rifles and talking about future maneuvers and many a soldiers’ favorite topic, girls.\textsuperscript{328}

Figure 34: A regular soldier\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{328} Photoplay Magazine, October 1958
\textsuperscript{329} Taylor, Jr  Elvis Presley preparing to fire a 3.5 inch rocket launcher (tank killer) while on maneuvers in Germany.
Though both the Army and Presley, or rather his manager Colonel Tom Parker, wanted Presley treated like a normal soldier, neither could allow that to happen. Presley’s mere presence on base was troublesome for the military. While Presley was on base the Military Police and fellow soldiers had to be on guard for fans compromising the security of the base and sneaking onto the Kaserne\textsuperscript{330} to catch a glimpse of or possibly take pictures with the star.\textsuperscript{331} Though the fans’ intentions may have been benign, the Cold War was in full swing and any attempts to breech the Kaserne’s security were treated with the utmost concern.

\textsuperscript{330} Kaserne – term used for military bases in Germany.  
\textsuperscript{331} Taylor, Jr. pg. 55-56 and Mansfield & Mansfield pg. 107
Presley also brought additional baggage that did not typically accompany the average PFC, an entourage. Presley’s family, then consisting of his father and grandmother, and two friends moved to Germany to be with Presley and he was given special permission to live off base. Typically, military personnel must live on base unless

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332 Schröer
This is the closest to danger that Presley came while in the service. Military Police holding German Elvis fans back when he arrived in Germany.
they are married or have children. The military and Presley were able to get around this rule by claiming that Elvis’s grandmother and father depended on him for monetary support and so they were, in fact, dependents and as such qualified Presley to live off the Kaserne. Although the location of Presley’s home in the village of Bad Nauheim was well known by Presley fans and the media alike, only the rare journalist ventured to the home and, even then, they usually only found themselves waiting outside with a gaggle of fans and were typically only granted a photo with his father. Presley was under the watchful eye of Uncle Sam for most of the day and that of his father, Vernon, at night.

333 Taylor, Jr pg. 28
334 Schröer pg. 89
335 Letter from LTC L.M. Johnson, Jr. Office of the Chief of Legislative Liaison to Senator William Proxmire, December 13, 1958

“This letter is in reply to your recent inquiry in behalf of Mr. Lawrence Grube, who has alleged special privileges in connection with the military service of Elvis Presley.

It is difficult to be responsive in the absence of specific allegations. I believe it pertinent to note, however, that Department of the Army policy precludes both favoritism and discrimination in the utilization of public figures such as athletes and entertainers with national reputations. In implementation of this policy, the Army has been hampered by extremes of both adulation and vituperation on the part of segments of the general public.

Private Presley was inducted into the military service by due process of law. He was trained in accordance with procedures applicable to all those who enter the Army for the first time, and he was assigned overseas against a military requirement for personnel of his military as distinguished from his civilian specialty.

During his training the Army disapproved many requests for his appearance at civic events. Counter to the desires of many of his fans, he has not been assigned to Special Services.

May I add that the utilization of private funds is a matter over which the Army has no jurisdiction; and that any serviceman whose dependents reside in Germany on the German economy is authorized to reside outside the military installation, provided residency does not interfere with his performance of his military duties.

Your interest in this matter is appreciated.”
Presley’s military service as a regular soldier and the control over information and photos of Presley that was exercised by the military and Colonel Tom Parker during Presley’s time in Germany quelled concerns of overexposure. During his military service Presley was completely off limits except to Uncle Sam, and Uncle Sam was not interested in having Presley, the rock ‘n’ roll star, paraded around like a show pony or having any of his misdeeds appearing on the front page of newspapers across the globe—unless it served its own needs. Colonel Tom Parker did not even have contact with Presley except through daily letters that he wrote to America’s most famous soldier which went unanswered.\textsuperscript{336} The military only conducted two press conferences while Presley was in the military, one when he arrived in Germany and one when he was honorably discharged. Only one interview was granted during his service to a reporter from \textit{Stars and Stripes}, the military’s newspaper.\textsuperscript{337} In April 1959 Presley and his unit were ordered to assist with the renovations to a memorial in Steinfurth dedicated to German soldiers who died in WWI. Pictures of the event feature Presley prominently as suggest that he played an active role in constructing the memorial. However, Presley’s unit had no business taking part in the reconstruction of a memorial. It was an Armored Division skilled with weapons and tanks not soldiers serving in the Army’s Corps of Engineers. The only reason his unit was called to take part was so the Army could get pictures of Presley working in tandem with German citizens in building a German

\textsuperscript{336} Nash pg. 181
\textsuperscript{337} Schröer pg. 145
memorial. Because he did not serve in the Special Services Division the participation of his entire unit was required to order Presley to participate.

Figure 36: Heroes 1914-1918

Serving his two years as a regular soldier, as opposed to a performer with the Special Services division, helped mend the schism that had grown between Presley and the parents of his fans. Fathers who had teenage daughters in the mid-late 1950’s had most likely served in World War II. Just as they did their duty in WWII, Presley had turned his back on his highly successful music career and was doing his duty in Germany.\textsuperscript{339} New articles reported that Presley had grossed $1,600,000 in 1957. Presley gave up the possibility to repeat those earnings and, instead, opted for Army pay of only $109.54.\textsuperscript{340} Though Presley’s peacetime draft and military service was a far cry from WWII combat, the fraternity that exists between men who have served in the military was extended, though cautiously, to Presley after his induction and basic training.

Presley’s military service transformed him from a boy to a man. The transformative power of the military would be proven if it could take the pinnacle of the rock ‘n’ roll generation and force him to mature. If the Army could transform Presley, there was hope for the sons of America who wore their hair long and listened to rock ‘n’ roll.

Finally, Presley’s military service made him patriotic, ordinary, vulnerable, and more accessible to his fans. Ironically, this final item was mainly achieved through unordinary and flashy musical and cinematic ways while Presley was in the Army and

\textsuperscript{339} Though, not completely.
\textsuperscript{340} Elvis only netted $99.86 of each paycheck as a Sergeant. 
\textit{New York Times}, March 5, 1960
immediately after his honorable discharge. Colonel Tom Parker was presented with a unique challenge while Presley was in the military, Presley had left very little unreleased recorded material prior to his induction so Parker had to monopolize upon Presley’s mere 14 days of leave prior to being transferred from Ft. Hood to Ray Barracks, Germany by having Presley record new material.\textsuperscript{341} In contrast to his early songs, like “Jailhouse Rock,” the bulk of the material released while Presley was in the Army had the common theme of sadness, loneliness, undying love, and vulnerability.\textsuperscript{342}

Several of the albums and singles released also had pictures of Presley alone in his uniform on the covers. The loneliness and vulnerability in his songs and the solitary pictures of the rock ‘n’ roll star in his uniform were visual reminders that Presley was doing his patriotic duty and he was alone while doing so.

\textsuperscript{341} Nash pg. 178
\textsuperscript{342} The 1959 album, \textit{A Date with Elvis}, included songs with the lyrics: “Oh won’t you take me back/ And say that you still love me” (It Is So Strange – Young & Houten), “There’s no joy in my heart, only sorrow/ And I’m as sad as a man can be/ I sit alone in the darkness of my lonely room/ And this room is a prison to me” (I Want to be Free – Leiber & Stoller), and “Blue moon, keep on shining bright/ You’re gonna bring me back my baby tonight” (Blue Moon of Kentucky – Monroe).
Presley’s time in the military increased his fans’ devotion and their fanatic antics. The old-adage claims distance makes the heart grow fonder. Presley’s distance from Hollywood and the recording studios of Memphis seems to have done just that to his fans that were left behind wondering what their idol was doing and counting down the days until his return. As Presley boarded the ship to Germany he made the statement regarding his desire to be remembered while he served out his time in the military, “In

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The 1959 holiday card sent out to fans by Colonel Tom Parker. Never one to be far from Presley’s side, Colonel Tom Parker is dressed up as Santa in the center of the card.
spite of the fact that I’m going away and I’ll be out of their eyes for some time, I hope
I’m not out of their minds.”

In the 1994 documentary *Why Elvis?*, Naomia Stiers, the oldest living Presley fan
club president at the time, recalled her efforts to keep Presley’s popularity intact while he
served abroad. She spent $5 every other week in every jukebox available playing
Presley songs. She and her friends who were also Presley fans would not stay to listen to
the songs they requested, but would race off to the next jukebox. They also knew all the
local DJs by name and would call non-stop to request Presley songs. While in Germany,
whenever a new Presley record would come out she and her friends would also order 25
copies a piece from the local record store. They were intent on not letting Presley be
forgotten while he was serving his country. Presley was doing his part for his country
and they were doing their part for Presley. While Presley served his country, his female
fans remained faithful, kept the home fires burning and the record players turning.

6.12 Militarization after Presley’s Discharge

After Presley was honorably discharged from the military he set to work on a new
film, *GI Blues*. The film was made with the full participation of the US Army and in it
Presley played a homesick good-ol’ boy, with a heart of gold, love for rock ‘n’ roll, and a
voice for it too, who was serving in the Army in Germany. There are so few differences

344 Mansfield & Mansfield pg. 60
345 Stiers was 88 years old at the time the documentary was released.
346 *Why Elvis?* 1994, White Star
between Presley and his character that the lines of reality are blurred and it is easy to forget that it is not really Presley on screen and that he is playing a part.\textsuperscript{347}

A review of the film claimed that the Elvis that American knew before his induction was almost unrecognizable in the film. “Honest, you’d hardly know Elvis – the pre-Army Elvis, that is – in the sweet-natured, morally straight young soldier now to be seen on the…screen. Gone is that rock ‘n’ roll wriggle, that ludicrously lecherous leer, that precocious county-bumpkin swagger, that unruly mop of oily hair…Elvis has become sophisticated. He is a man of the world – almost.”\textsuperscript{348} Presley had become a man; or as close to a man that the American press would allow.

Presley seemed somewhat ‘safer’ after his military service. Linden refers to the Ed Sullivan Show’s refusal to show Presley’s body from the waist down during his second performance as “omission as blanching” and suggests that it was this appearance that presented a ‘safer’ image of Presley to the world.\textsuperscript{349} Linden also argues that once Presley’s offending hips were removed that he, as a celebrity, was “now disinfected and de-sexualized was fit for consumption.”\textsuperscript{350} However, I disagreed with this oversimplification and argue that Presley transformation was ongoing and was not complete until after his military service. Presley’s first performance on national television after serving in the Army highlights this point. In it Presley and Frank Sinatra

\textsuperscript{347} Presley stared in five films between 1960 and 1969 where he portrayed either an active duty service member or a veteran. \textit{GI Blues, Blue Hawaii, Kid Galahad, Kissin' Cousins, and Easy Come, Easy Go}
\textsuperscript{348} Crowther, \textit{Washington Post and Times Herald}, November 5, 1960
\textsuperscript{349} Linden pg. 54
\textsuperscript{350} Linden pg. 53
appeared together. Sinatra vehemently disliked rock ‘n’ roll even writing in *Western World* magazine, that rock ‘n’ roll was "sung, played and written for the most part by cretinous goons and by means of its almost imbecilic reiterations and sly, lewd—in plain fact, dirty—lyrics, and as I said before, it manages to be the martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth … this rancid-smelling aphrodisiac I deplore."351 Yes, Sinatra was an avowed Presley hater. Presley’s transformation, which began during his military service, was complete when Presley sang a Sinatra song ("Witchcraft"), Sinatra sang a Presley song ("Love Me Tender"), and Presley and Sinatra sang a duet on national television. His new image continued to be used by his manager in the years to follow and projects were created to tie into his military service, including the first movie released after his service, *G.I. Blues*.

351 Frank Sinatra *Western World*, 1957
On the DVD cover for Presley’s first movie after his discharge from the Army, G.I. Blues, Presley is shown looking sharp in a regulation Army uniform and sporting a less-than-regulation haircut.

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352 On the DVD cover for Presley’s first movie after his discharge from the Army, G.I. Blues, Presley is shown looking sharp in a regulation Army uniform and sporting a less-than-regulation haircut.
*GI Blues*, like all of his movies contained several songs by Presley, including the movie’s namesake, “GI Blues.” In it, Presley’s character, SPC 5 Tulsa McLean, laments his time in Germany and longs for his home state of Texas. Though the lyrics are simplistic and corny at times, the song presents McLean and, by extension, Presley as an ordinary soldier “from [his] G.I. hair to the heels of [his] G.I. shoes” and suggests that Presley’s time in Germany was spent in a state of homesick melancholy and loneliness.

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**“G.I. Blues”**

*(words & music by Sid Tepper - Roy Bennett)*

They give us a room
with a view of the beautiful Rhine
They give us a room
with a view of the beautiful Rhine
Gimme a muddy old creek
in Texas any old time

I've got those hup, two, three, four
occupation G.I. Blues
From my G.I. hair to the heels of my G.I. shoes
And if I don't go stateside soon
I'm gonna blow my fuse

We get hasenpfeffer
and black pumpernickel for chow
We get hasenpfeffer

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353 Song by Sid Tepper & Roy Bennett
and black pumpernickel for chow
I'd blow my next month's pay
for a slice of Texas cow

We'd like to be heroes,
but all we do here is march
We'd like to be heroes,
but all we do here is march
And they don't give the Purple Heart
for a fallen arch

I've got those hup, two, three, four
occupation G.I. Blues
From my G.I. hair to the heels of my G.I. shoes
And if I don't go stateside soon
I'm gonna blow my fuse

The frauleins are pretty as flowers
But we can't make a pass
The frauleins are pretty as flowers
But we can't make a pass
Cause they're all wearin' signs saying:
"Keepen sie off the grass"

I've got those hup, two, three, four
occupation G.I. Blues
From my G.I. hair to the heels of my G.I. shoes
And if I don't go stateside soon
I'm gonna blow my fuse

His desire to be a “hero” never comes to fruition because “all we do here is march
and they don’t give a Purple Heart for a fallen arch.” The movie and song reinforced
the concept that Presley had done his duty, had suffered all the normal bouts of
homesickness that every soldier goes through, had tried to be the best soldier he could
be, and had grown from the boy that America had known prior to his draft into a man, all the while retaining his love for rock ‘n’ roll.

Several articles appeared after Presley’s discharge discussing the positive changes that journalists had witnessed. “Whatever else the Army has done for Elvis Presley, it has taken that indecent swivel out of his hips and turned him into a good, clean, trustworthy, upstanding American young man.”354 Hedda Hooper argued that “fans may have wept when [Elvis’s] sideburns and pompadour were disposed at an induction center, but the full measure of the man is emphasized by their absence. He stands head and shoulders over many of the young men I’ve known who’ve done their two-year stretch in the Army.”355 Even Presley-hating Lawrence Laurent gave Presley credit for serving as a regular soldier and not spending his two years as a singer, as many drafted singers had done before him.356

All the changes that were noted during and after Presley’s military service laid the groundwork for Presley’s enduring fame that is present to this day. While military service took Elvis Presley out of the spotlight for two years at the height of his early fame it helped repair Presley’s image that had been tarnished by his gyrating hips, fights, and his fans’ behavior. In turn, Presley’s presence in the military and transformation during his 18 months as a soldier reinforced the notion that the military

354 New York Times, November 5, 1960
355 Washington Post and Times Herald, July 16, 1961
356 Washington Post and Times Herald, May 8, 1960
was still a transformative entity. Presley’s time in the military transformed Presley’s image from that of a wriggling, lecherous, dangerous Pied Piper, to a patriotic, upstanding, citizen, a good soldier, and a grown man, with a penchant for rock ‘n’ roll.

Elvis Presley continued serving the military in two distinct ways, both performative, after leaving active duty. First, Presley stared in five films between 1960 and 1969 where he portrayed either an active duty service member or a veteran. This stands to reason when Morin’s argument about the relations between the star and characters played by the star is taken into consideration. “The star is not only an [actor.] The characters [he] plays are not only characters. The characters of [his] films infect the star. Reciprocally, the star [himself] infects these characters.”

357 GI Blues, Blue Hawaii, Kid Galahad, Kissin’ Cousins, and Easy Come, Easy Go
358 Morin pg. 27
Presley and his characters were both influenced by Presley’s military service, but in no way showed the reality of service or returning from it. Presley’s characters lived in worry-free worlds of romance and adventure.

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Presley’s character, Chad Gates, returns home from the Army in Blue Hawaii (1961). Of particular note is the Division Insignia on the arm of Presley’s costume, 3rd Armored Division, belongs to the same Division that Presley himself served with.
Second, Presley was very active in raising money for the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, HI. The USS Arizona was one of five battleships sunk or run aground during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The USS Arizona was too damaged to be recovered and remained submerged in the harbor. The construction of a memorial to the men lost on the USS Arizona, but the government required that $500,000 of the cost of the memorial be privately funded. On March 25, 1961, Presley performed a benefit concert for the USS Arizona Memorial and raised $54,000 in a few short hours, 10% of the funds needed to build the memorial.³⁶⁰

The photo above shows Presley at a news conference prior to his concert to raise funds for the USS Arizona. Presley’s participation in raising funds for the memorial reminded the American public that, even though he had returned to rock ‘n’ roll, he had not forgotten the values he learned while serving in the Army.

6.13 Continued Militarization of Presley After Death
Presley’s militarization did not end with his death on August 16, 1977. In the years since his discharge, Presley’s military service became part of his celebrity identity,

as shown above, and Elvis Presley Enterprises kept the militarization going after his death. A myriad of collectible items were released after Presley’s death that utilized his militarized image. Including trading cards, commemorative plates, dolls, and cross-over branding.
Figure 41: Elvis Army Days Trading Cards 1992\textsuperscript{362}

\textsuperscript{362} Released by Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc. and The River Group
In 1992 Elvis Presley Enterprises, in conjunction with The River Group, released a series of Elvis Army Days Trading Cards. Each card featured a picture from Presley’s time in the Army and a short bit of information. They featured everything from official staged photos, to candid photos, to photos in the field, but shared the same focal point, Presley. The fact that these cards were released as collectables for Presley fans show that Presley fans were still interested in Presley’s military service and in militarized images of the King, even in the 1990s. Though this certainly was not the last militarized Presley collectable.

In 1998, Elvis Presley Enterprises, in conjunction with Mattel, the maker of Barbie, released The Elvis Presley Collection, a collection of three dolls including a doll featuring Presley in his famous black leather suit from his ’68 comeback special, the third, and last of the series featured Presley in a gold lame suit made popular during an appearance in Chicago in 1957. Presley in his Army uniform was the second doll released in the series. Mattel released the following statement when announcing the doll:

If you love a man in uniform, you'll surely want this authentic re-creation of Elvis in uniform. The King of Rock "n Roll proudly wears his olive green [A]rmy dress uniform with insignias, medal, hat, and ID tags. His new G. I. haircut completes the proud, clean-cut look befitting an American soldier. Don't wait too long to

make your move, as accessories include a photo and "letter" from Priscilla Beaulieu.\textsuperscript{364}

Once again, like in many of the films where Presley played an active duty soldier or a veteran, the ensigna is from Presley’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Armored Division.

\textsuperscript{364} http://barbie.mattel.com/shop/en-us/ba/barbie-hollywood-dolls/elvis-army-years-21912
Figure 42: Elvis in the Army doll\textsuperscript{365} 

\textsuperscript{365} http://barbie.mattel.com/shop/en-us/ba/barbie-hollywood-dolls/elvis-army-years-21912
The fact that Presley in his Army uniform was even included in the series, let alone as doll two of a set of three, once again shows how integrated Presley’s military service has become to his celebrity identity. Additionally, releasing a doll dressed in a military uniform presents Presley’s uniform like a costume that can be put on and removed with no acknowledgement of the responsibilities that come with it.

More recently, in 2005, Elvis Presley Enterprises even participated in cross-branding with Disney when Disney released a pin featuring it’s popular alien character, and Presley fan, Stitch dressed as Presley in his uniform. The Disney movie, *Lilo & Stitch*, featured more Presley songs than were in any single file that Presley starred in and Elvis impersonation by one of the title character’s, the mischievous alien, Stitch, played a large role in the movie.
This example takes the idea of Presley’s as a costume further than the doll shown above because in this example Presley’s uniform is being donned by a character attempting to look like Presley. Additionally, all of these items present Presley and his service as a form of entertainment and, while nodding to the patriotism of his service, almost completely abolish the reality of his service by making his uniform a costume.

6.14 Presley Masking the Horrors of War

As has been discussed above, the militarization of Presley masked the horrors of war in the following ways. The lack of information about Presley’s military service

\[\text{6.14 Presley Masking the Horrors of War}\]

\[\text{As has been discussed above, the militarization of Presley masked the horrors of war in the following ways. The lack of information about Presley’s military service}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{366} Stitch from \textit{Lilo} \& \textit{Stitch} (2002) dressed as Elvis Presley in his Army uniform with a Sargent’s bars.}\]
released by the military made the media the main source of information about Presley’s military service. Because of the concerns of preferential treatment and his serving as a regular soldier, rather than in the Special Services Division, the Army was forced to be extremely careful with Presley and the information released about his during his service. This arrangement ceded power to shape the narrative surrounding Presley’s service to the media and his manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

Parker used Presley’s service and the media’s and fan’s desire for all things Presley to his advantage and drove a campaign to transform his image. Images of Presley on Christmas cards, album covers, and in magazines overwhelmingly showed a smiling Presley serving his country like a patriot. The images showed a comfortable Presley completing his service in Germany and always looking like a celebrity.

After his discharge, Presley’s militarization continued through his films and presented service as a walk in the park. His characters presented an image of service as an interlude leading to romance and adventure. Presley’s militarization even continued after his death through the release of collectables featuring Presley and his uniform that further romanticized and aestheticized military service and masked its violent ends by transforming Presley’s service into an image of his celebrity and his Army uniform into a costume.
Celebrity military service was prevalent among celebrities in 20th century America, particularly during WWII, though most service to the military was not done through an active duty arrangement. Many celebrities served through the United Service Organizations (USO), a nonprofit organization that has worked in tandem with the Department of Defense since 1941. The USO has provided entertainment and comfort to troops serving abroad since WWII and has teamed up with celebrities like the Andrews Sisters, Marilyn Monroe, and Bob Hope. The author John Steinbeck, who was a war correspondent in 1943, said of Hope:

[w]hen the time for recognition of service to the nation in wartime comes to be considered, Bob Hope should be high on the list. This man drives himself and is driven. It is impossible to see how he can do so much, can cover so much ground, can work so hard, and can be so effective. He works month after month at a pace that would kill most people.\(^\text{367}\)

\(^{367}\) John Steinbeck, *New York Herald Tribune*, July 26, 1943
The last draft orders in the United States were issued in early 1973. After the draft ended few celebrities entered active duty military service.\(^{368}\) Militarization of celebrity generally no longer takes place in relation to active duty service, but through entertainment and morale building spectacles. Shows put on for the benefit of active duty service members and dependents but also televised to the general public continue to mask the horrors of war.

To show that this masking is still current, this conclusion will briefly discuss two examples of nationwide performed patriotism, “The USO Presents VH1 Divas Salute the Troops” and the World Wrestling Federation’s “Tribute to the Troops.”

In 2010 the USO and VH1 presented “The USO Presents VH1 Divas Salute the Troops” featuring Katy Perry, Nicki Minaj, and Paramore, among others. This event was publicized through advertisements that presented the female performers as updated pin-up gals.

\(^{368}\) A notable exception is Arizona Cardinal’s football player, Pat Tillman, who volunteered to serve as an Army Ranger in June 2002 and was killed by friendly fire on April 22, 2004. Tillman was not included in the case studies because his military records have not been declassified yet.
Many of the performers appeared in military and patriotic inspired costumes, at one point several of the performers even appeared as the Andrews Sisters. However, it was the performers’ use of the salute that is most notable. Usually reserved as a sign of

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369 VH1
Pin-up throw back: advertisement for "The USO presents Vh1 Divas Salute the Troops." Of note is Katy Perry’s unwieldy and altogether bondage like homage to WWII pin-ups.
respect for someone of higher rank, the performers use of the salute, even when not in military or patriotic costume, symbolized a performed patriotism.

Figure 45: Katy Perry performing during “The USO Presents: VH1 Divas Salute the Troops”
December 3, 2010
Figure 46: Not compromising her offbeat style with an expected uniform, Nicki Minaj nevertheless salutes the crowd
Though this Divas’ show was not the only widely televised tribute. For the past 13 years the World Wrestling Federation (WWE) has presented a “Tribute to the Troops.” These events have been staged at arenas close to major military bases across the US and are attended by both active duty military and dependents. According to a WWE press release “In the tradition of Bob Hope, WWE brings together the best of entertainment and pop culture with celebrity appearances and performances for our servicemen and women to celebrate their dedication and commitment to our country with a holiday program that is considered one of television’s most patriotic and heartwarming shows.”

These tributes traditionally follow a specified pattern of rumbles with ever increasing numbers of participants from the WWE galaxy of stars and the “Tribute to the Troops” that aired on December 17, 2014 was no different. During the course of the show the ring was taken over by “Russian” wrestler, Rusev, and his hype woman/“cultural ambassador,” Lana who, with a thick Russian accent, praises Mother Russia at any opportunity she is given. This night she decided to berate the audience of service members and dependents for not bowing down before the ‘supreme athlete,’ Rusev, and then continues to suggest that if the audience cannot show him the respect he deserves that they should rather bow down to their ‘future leader,’ Vladimir Putin.

This was met by deafening boos from the crowd until Daniel Bryan entered the arena. Bryan, an All-American wrestler who appeared to look more like a lumberjack than a wrestler, entered the arena in blue jeans and a blue plaid shirt. Bryan, who had been semi-retired due to an injury, stated “We will come from anywhere to defend our freedoms. And when you challenge me, you are challenging everybody in this arena tonight.” He then warns his competitor that ‘proud Americans can come from anywhere.’

Suddenly, two active duty service members jump over the dividing wall and stand at attention outside of the ring. They are followed shortly by two additional active duty service members who repel from the ceiling of the area to post up at the two other opposite ends of the ring. Rusev is surrounded and Bryan has not even taken a step toward the ring.

Bryan represents the everyday American threatened by America’s traditional enemy and who is backed up by and backs up the entire might of the US Military. After Rusev and Lana slink away Bryan and the active duty service members who had his back took to the ring to celebrate their victory. This performed victory was met with even louder cheers and Bryan, though the celebrity, attracted less attention than the active duty services members in the ring with them.
Figure 47: Performed Victory: Daniel Bryan and American active duty service members after their defeat of Rusev at the WWE “Tribute to the Troops” December 2014

Events like these and the celebrity participation and performances, in a similar way to Jimmy Stewart, Joe Louis, and Elvis Presley’s service continue to mask the horrors of war through militarized entertainment.
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Rebecca Forrest resents having to write this section.