The GI Coffeehouse Movement, 1968-1972: Class-Based Activism in the Vietnam War

by

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Abstract

This work examines the GI coffeehouse movement of the Vietnam era in the United States from the years 1968 to 1972 by analyzing the underground newspapers that the coffeehouses produced. From one perspective this work focuses on the coffeehouse organizers and those who professed opposition to the coffeehouse movement. Another perspective studies the movement with a focus on the U.S. Army in the American South. Finally, this work analyzes how the coffeehouse movement grew and expanded both regionally and internationally, and eventually established itself within other branches of the military. The coffeehouses that will be the primary subjects of this work were in the American South, on the West Coast, and in Hawaii, Canada, Germany, and Japan. These coffeehouses addressed an array of different issues including racism, rights within the military, and women's rights. Despite the differences in grievances and methods of activism, ideas about class and nationalism underpinned much of the GI coffeehouse movement.

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Introduction

In 2010, outside of Fort Lewis in Lakewood, Washington, Seth Manzel, a former infantry squad leader during the Iraq War, ran a coffee shop called Coffee Strong. Manzel served coffee to veterans as a way of giving back to his community. "I feel like I've definitely done some things that are pretty horrific" he admitted, "and that I've got a debt to the world to work off." This coffeehouse was an off-base location that military members could visit for a cup of coffee, relaxation, and conversation. According to Manzel, it "encourage[d] soldiers to advocate for themselves," and "help[ed] people stay in the Army, if that's what they want[ed] to do," as well as "help[ed] AWOL soldiers get back into the Army."[1] Like Coffee Strong, other coffee shops supporting Iraq and Afghanistan veterans popped up across the United States during the 2000s. They were not the first coffee shops of their kind, however, GI coffeehouses not so different from those with the purpose of supporting Iraq and Afghanistan veterans opened their doors to veterans and active military personnel alike outside of military bases during the Vietnam War as well. These earlier coffeehouses, however, embraced more politically charged motives and proved to be much more divisive in the public eye.

The Vietnam era was a tumultuous time in American history, with some historians arguing that only the Civil War was a more divisive moment in the nation's past. Entangled with the civil rights movement and unfolding against the backdrop of the decades-long Cold War, it was an intense time of unsettling rapid change and uncertainty, of internal divisions laid bare within a nation where many leaders sought to emphasize cohesiveness and consensus. Known as one of the most divisive military conflicts in American history, the Vietnam War led many

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[1] Jon R. Anderson, "GI Java," *The Army Times*, March 1, 2010, LexisNexis.

people to question not only their country's involvement in external affairs, but perhaps even more significantly to question the very motives of their own governments. In response to their mounting concerns, growing numbers of Americans began to translate their questions and concerns into action through their participation in a broad-based antiwar movement. The antiwar movement of the Vietnam era was the strongest groundswell of opposition to a war that America had ever witnessed in terms of scale, scope, and duration. Protest against the Vietnam War has reverberated in music, film and television, fiction and other popular cultural media from the time the dissent first surfaced in the 1960s until the present day. Political, social, and cultural historians of modern American history have joined journalists and other commentators in chronicling the antiwar movement in hundreds of books and articles, scholarly and nonscholarly alike. However, little has been known or written about a smaller facet of the spectrum of antiwar activism known as the GI coffeehouse movement. Situated in the broader context of the New Left, the GI coffeehouse movement tackled an array of social issues including class struggles, racial and gender oppression, and individuals' rights within the military.

In *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* Staughton Lynd lays the intellectual groundwork for the rise of American radicalism during the age of revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further, he explores the implications of this earlier history of radicalism for the twentieth century in noting how the New Left tried to reclaim, and even rescue, civic nationalism during the Cold War.[2] As this work on GI coffeehouses will show, GI coffeehouse activists engaged in a similar act of reclamation as they sought to regain an array of individual rights. Activists created their own sense of nationalism by utilizing language steeped in America's founding ideals and engaging in patriotic acts such as quoting the Declaration of

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[2] Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 7.

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Independence in their publications and passing out the Bill of Rights on and near the military installations where the coffeehouses were located. This assertion of a unique form of nationalism is richly documented in the underground newspapers that are analyzed in this thesis's two chapters.

GI coffeehouses of the Vietnam War era were adamantly opposed to America's ongoing military involvement in Southeast Asia, but like the coffeehouses that arose more than three decades later, they first and foremost sought to support veterans. It is important to note that these coffeehouses were not anti-soldier, just antiwar. The GI coffeehouses of the Vietnam era were near bases across the country and provided a location for GIs to escape from the bases, be with likeminded individuals, and discuss their dissent for the war.

In his work *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era,* David Parsons argues that the history of the GI coffeehouses offers a remarkably different view of the antiwar movement than that of the "stereotype of angry protesters spitting on heroic war veterans."[3] Breaking down the traditional divisions of veterans vs. antiwar activists, Parsons instead demonstrates that "radical civilians, veterans, and active-duty GI's worked together to organize unprecedented dissent within the U.S. Army during one of the most divisive wars in the nation's history."[4] In this examination of the GI coffeehouses, Parsons details the movement and highlights the significance of civilians and GIs joining for their common cause against the war in Vietnam. For him, the most striking feature of the coffeehouse

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[3] David L. Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 2.
[4] Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 12-13.

movement lay in the fact that civilians and military members were working together rather than in opposition.

Writing in a similar historiographical vein as Parsons, James Lewes in *Protest and Survive: Underground GI Newspapers during the Vietnam War* offers insight into the antiwar movement as he analyzes GI newspapers. Lewes attempts to understand the GI movement by reconstructing the environment in which it emerged, the coffeehouses and the GI newspapers. Lewes concludes:

> The fact a plurality of GIs opposed any further US involvement in Vietnam's civil war had to have added to the administration's predicament. When all else is said and done, the fact that the GI press provided these GIs concrete evidence that they were not alone in their opposition means that these papers – and their networkers—helped end U.S. intervention in South Vietnam.[5]

Essentially, the fact that the GI dissenters were numerous enough to run a coffeehouse network across the United States and abroad, and the fact that they circulated a vast number of newspapers proves to Lewes that they were indeed successful in aiding in hastening the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. However, a significant problem with his argument is that Lewes never states the direct correlation between the circulation of newspapers and drawing troops out of Vietnam, and at no point do the newspapers suggest a cause and effect relationship between GI newspaper production and the end to U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. For this reason, this work will take a different approach by focusing on the effect of GI newspaper production and circulation in coordination with coffeehouse activism *on the servicemembers themselves* rather than staking out similarly broad claims about causality.

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[5] James Lewes, *Protest and Survive: Underground GI Newspapers during the Vietnam War* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 152.

During the Vietnam War, coffee shops started popping up outside of military installations. The first of these establishments was in Columbia, South Carolina outside of Fort Jackson, but ultimately numerous similar coffee shops proliferated across the country and even throughout the world in areas where the U.S. had a military presence.   Parsons focuses on what he refers to as the "three flagship" coffeehouses, the UFO, the Oleo Strut, and the Shelter Half, all of which associated with Army installations.   He details how they were founded and evolved over time and demonstrates that this system of coffeehouses was indeed a *movement*. The leading activist who started the coffeehouse in Columbia, South Carolina, Fred Gardner, was a civilian, activists, and journalist.[6] Gardner and other civilian antiwar activists wanted to fuel the antiwar movement from within the Army itself by first establishing the coffeehouse in Columbia and then planting others in Killeen, Texas (Oleo Strut) and Tacoma, Washington (Shelter Half.) While these first few coffeehouses may have been started by civilians, the effect that they had on active servicemembers and the role that active servicemembers had in those coffeehouses is noteworthy. Whether or not the GIs themselves started the movement, it is obvious that the movement certainly affected them in profound ways.

This work will focus on the years 1968 to 1972 because these were the most active years for the particular coffeehouses that this work will study in terms of the establishments being open for business and producing the highest volume of newspapers. It should be noted, however, that some coffeehouses organized and produced newspapers before and after the chronology this thesis explores.. Centers for antiwar organizing, these coffee shops were unique in the fact that they welcomed both civilians and enlisted servicemembers as patrons, two groups that would otherwise be existing in two different worlds. Members of both groups could sit and chat over a

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[6] Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 3.

cup of coffee. Often, the conversations drifted toward antiwar topics or other issues and grievances that existed in the local communities where the coffeehouses opened.

These antiwar coffee shops did not exist without opposition. Tensions flared regularly between activists and local authorities and the military, as well as members of the general public who objected to the presence of the GI coffeehouses and questioned the motives of those who ran and frequented them. Differing perceptions of the GI coffeehouse movement held by insiders and outsiders proved to be a significant obstacle to the development and sustainability of the movement. This work argues that the GI coffeehouse movement was built on diverse goals and faced concerted opposition. In fact, the movement also struggled due to an ideological divide internally in that coffeehouses in the South focused on social issues such as anti-racism, the desire for more rights in the military, and rights for women. Meanwhile, coffeehouses to the West and abroad organized more radically along the lines of class-based politics with an undercurrent of nationalism. Because of the diversity of goals within the movement and opposition from without, the GI coffeehouse movement was short-lived, and only managed to foster class solidarity between servicemembers within the coffeehouse movement rather than translating its objectives to a broader cross-section of the American public. Ultimately the architects of the movement were not successful in their efforts to reshape both society and the military, both of which that they desperately wanted to change.

This thesis is divided into two chapters. The first closely examines the GI coffeehouse movement through a regional study by focusing on the movement in the South and examining several coffeehouses associated with the U.S. Army. While this regional perspective of the GI coffeehouse movement largely parallels the findings of David Parsons and James Lewes, the findings are significant because it enforces the idea that coffeehouses that existed in the South

were different than those that existed in other regions of the nation and internationally. Those

who ran and frequented the coffeehouses in the South tended to be preoccupied by social and

political movements that were happening around them but steered away from the more radical

language of the coffeehouses in the West, Hawaii, and abroad. Coffeehouses in the South were

concerned with critiquing the American empire by engaging with social issues that they wished

to change while coffeehouses to the west and especially abroad were concerned with critiquing

and redefining American Empire. Chapter Two shows how the phenomenon of the coffeehouse

movement came to touch other branches of the military. This perspective offers a significant

addition to the existing historiography since the three main coffeehouses that Parsons focuses on

are associated with Army bases in the U.S. Chapter Two also demonstrates that coffeehouses to

the West and abroad organized in a more revolutionary manner by engaging in class politics with

a uniquely nationalistic undercurrent. By using patriotic language in their underground

newspapers western and international coffeehouse activists redefined nationalism for themselves

in ways that helped them redefine both America's role in the world and its civic meaning for its

own citizens. Despite the diversity of issues that these coffeehouses addressed, similarities such

as class unity and an undercurrent of reformulated nationalism proved to be especially

significant. Analysis of coffeehouse activism sheds light both on a broad critique of the

American empire and a desire on the part of the GI activists and their civilian allies to redefine

that empire and the nationalism underpinning it.

Chapter 1

Southern GI Coffeehouse Activism: Rights and Resistance

GI coffeehouses of the Vietnam War era were adamantly opposed to war, but like the coffeehouses that came to be thirty years later, they supported veterans. It is important to note that these coffeehouses were not anti-soldier, just antiwar. Located outside of military bases across the country, GI coffeehouses provided a location for dissenting GIs to escape from the bases, be with likeminded individuals, and discuss their dissent for the war in Vietnam. Antiwar activists and historians of the antiwar movement alike have failed to appreciate the significance of coffeehouse activism within the growing ranks of dissenters in the Vietnam era. GI coffeehouse activists, were comprised of a diverse group of races, brought men and women together, and bridged the divide between civilians and active duty military personnel and veterans. GIs and their allies attempted to tap into growing opposition to the Vietnam War to rally support for an array of causes including GI rights in the military, anti-racism, and issues related to women's rights.[7] The GI coffeehouses gave activists a physical space in which to meet, always an important variable in the creation and maintenance of sustainable social movements, and their underground newspapers gave them a means to communicate with similarly-minded allies, potential converts, and diehard opponents alike.

One must consider the environment in which this movement arose. It is important to remember that the individuals who led GI coffeehouse activism were the product of their era. They were shaped by the still-unfolding civil rights movement as well as the emerging and

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[7] For a study of activism by military personnel in an earlier era activism please see Jennifer Brooks' *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* in which she explores the organizational efforts of black and white World War II veterans in Georgia.

evolving Black Power and feminist movements. They had witnessed and gained an awareness of racial and gender-based discrimination in their lifetime and were also increasingly sensitized to violence committed by the U.S. troops in Southeast Asia. Richard R. Moser supports this claim in his study of the antiwar movement, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era.* Moser argues that "the tension between the civil rights and Black Power movements created a realm of democracy and empowerment within the military."[8] In other words, because of the interplay between these movements and their heightened awareness of injustices at the social level, military members gained the power and the will to fight for democracy. The U.S. government had told U.S. troops that they were fighting for democracy by containing communism in Vietnam, but the ideals that accompanied the movements that came before them enlightened them on a different idea of what it meant to fight for democracy.

What is more, it was not just the movements for racial justice that empowered members of the antiwar movement. According to Moser, "welding diverse influences from the women's, workers', youth, African American, Latino, American Indian, gay, solidarity, and environmental movements together, the veterans and their supporters created a perspective consciously historical and deeply American in character."[9] Influenced by a diverse group of people and pulling on the tactics and beliefs of a diverse group of movements, antiwar activists joined the GI movement. Additionally, Moser posits that "feminism, black nationalism, the youth movement, and pacifism, as represented by social movements and communities, were critically important as available examples of ideals and freedom and equality."[10] Freedom as articulated through the

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[8] Richard R. Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 137.
[9] Moser, *The New Winter Soldier*, 139.
[10] Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers,* 5.

lens of greater rights for those serving in the military as well as aspirations to attain racial and gender equality were at the heart of the GI coffeehouse movement.

Using the newspapers that the GI Coffeehouses produced as primary sources, this work relies heavily on GI newspaper articles, letters to the editors, and newspapers advertisements. It is worth noting that the authors of many of the newspaper articles and letters to the editors elected to remain anonymous due to the dangerous nature of producing or contributing to such newspaper while being an enlisted active duty member of the military. Being caught brought serious consequences, and servicemembers could have faced dire repercussions for submitting letters to the underground newspapers or serving on the staff of the newspapers. While reliance on anonymous sources comes with its share of methodological challenges, these voices anonymous or not had important things to say.

A regional focus on the American South affords a unique opportunity to explore the culture of the early GI coffeehouse movement and situating an analysis of activists' concerns and actions against the aforementioned historiography of David L. Parsons, James Lewes, and Richard Moser. While the findings of this chapter largely parallel and support the findings of Parsons and Lewes, it is vital to lay the groundwork by examining the South as a regional study because of the stark differences between southern GI coffeehouses and coffeehouses on the West Coast and abroad. Many of the GI coffeehouses in the South organized to change element of their society, or to critique elements of the American empire. By contrast, western and international coffeehouses took a more radical approach to activism by focusing heavily on class politics and nationalism to in a sense redefine American empire and reclaim and reinvent nationalism.   The UFO Coffeehouse in Columbia, South Carolina; the Haymarket Square Coffeehouse in Fayetteville, North Carolina; and the Cellar Coffeehouse in Louisville, Kentucky

are the focus of this chapter because of their consistent patterns of activism, their steady

production of underground newspapers, and their southern locales. These newspapers give

insight into the issues that the GI coffeehouse movement activists faced and how they attempted

to bring about change. This work argues that the emphasis on rights within the military, whether

they be human, civil, or women's rights, show that GI coffeehouse activists were a group that

intersected many movements of their time. Furthermore, the occupational nature of being

drafted into the military, the working conditions, and coffeehouse activism afforded a glimpse

into the possibilities of a unification between men, women, blacks, whites, civilians, and

servicemembers. At the movement's core, class solidarity became the unifying force that drove

the coffeehouse movement.

As much as any other issue, conscription was the spark that ignited the flame of dissent

against the Vietnam War. According to Michael S. Foley, it was not until World War II that

Americans tolerated a peacetime army. During the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican

War, and the Spanish-American War, the armed forces of the United States relied on volunteer

servicemen. Stemming from the time when Britain stationed troops in the thirteen colonies,

Americans traditionally had opposed a standing army, and believed that standing peacetime

armies infringed on freedom. What is more, most Americans believed conscription to be

unnecessary and that citizens would fight for the country if the need arose.[11] As a result of this

predisposition, throughout American history, whenever the government has instituted the draft at

least some U.S. citizens have greeted conscription with some form of resistance.[12] During the

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[11] Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 35.

[12] One may argue that the Korean War could be considered the exception of overall national opposition to conscription. Melinda L. Pash posits in her work *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought in the Korean War* that citizens proudly answered the call for conscription as they had seen their fathers and brothers do during World War II. She emphasizes the contrast between the willingness to answer the call to arms by

Vietnam era, the draft issue provided the link between political action and personal commitment that radical pacifists had been seeking.[13] The draft was the one thing they could rally behind for political and social mobilization. And mobilize them it did. As antiwar activists went to work producing newspapers in coffeehouses across the nation to fuel the resistance to American involvement in Southeast Asia, the issue of the draft was an undercurrent that made audiences more receptive to their message of dissent.

One of the most important issues that frequented the pages of GI newspapers was the demand for immediate withdrawal from the war. Activists sought to mobilize support by asking the hard questions such as "Why are we in Vietnam?... Are we protecting the Vietnamese people? Are we stopping the communist menace?" The interrogatories continued in a 1971 issue of *Fun Travel Adventure*, a noteworthy coffeehouse newspaper: "Are we helping a duly elected government in its time of need? Was Vietnam simply a mistake? Or are we making Indochina a safe place for American businessmen?"[14] Such questions echoed the federal government's justification for intervention in Vietnam while simultaneously sowing doubts in the minds of the readers about the validity of the government's multiple and at times internally inconsistent rationales for the war. The newspaper went on to speculate that perhaps Indochina's richness in mineral and oils was the primary motivator for American involvement in Vietnam rather than more lofty and altruistic goals. To further apply the pressure for withdrawal, the newspaper pointed out that the U.S. also had economic motivations for being in Laos, Cambodia, South Africa, Brazil, Greece, Mexico, Canada, and Guatemala.[15] Many activists truly believed

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Korean War servicemembers and the growing reluctance of conscriptions during the era of the Vietnam War servicemembers.
[13] Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 46.
[14] "Why are We in Vietnam?" *Fun Travel Adventure*, August 1, 1971, Independent Voices.
[15] "Why are We in Vietnam?" *Fun Travel Adventure,* August 1, 1971, Independent Voices.

that greed rather than altruism and ideology drove U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and

this conviction led them to believe that the only right course of action would be withdrawal.

This vein of thought portraying the United States as projecting its military power

throughout the world purely for economic benefits, or for the expansion of empire, reflects the

work of Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman. In *Making the Empire Work: Labor and the

United States Imperialism*, a collection of essays, the co-editors argue for the recognition of the

United States as an empire and ask historians to reconsider who constitutes a laborer.[16] The

authors write that "No one would question whether factory workers are workers, but labor

historians have only just begun to incorporate military personnel into a broader narrative of

working-class history."[17] For the purpose of studying the GI coffeehouse movement it is

essential to consider military personnel as laborers of empire.[18]

Atrocities committed by American soldiers were another reason for activists' dissent

during the Vietnam War. On one infamous day in 1968, U.S. Army officers Captain Ernest

Medina and Lieutenant William Calley marched on a village that Medina had told his men was

believed to be "heavily fortified and manned by North Vietnamese and Vietcong." [19] His order

was to destroy everyone and everything in the village, resulting in the murder of over 500 men,

women, and children: with a disproportionate percentage of the elderly among the adult victims.

The atrocity became known as the My Lai Massacre.[20] Criticism of events like those that

transpired in the hamlets around My Lai and heightened scrutiny of violence committed by the

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[16] Daniel E. Bender and Jane K. Lipman, eds., *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 11.
[17] Bender and Lipman, *Making the America Work*, 11.
[18] For more information on military personnel as laborers please see Julie Geene's essay "The Wages of Empire: Capitalism, Expansionism, and Working-Class Formation" in *Making the Empire Work.*
[19] "Mi Lai and Yours: A Case for Withdrawal," *Short Times*, April 1970, Independent Voices.
[20] "Mi Lai and Yours: A Case for Withdrawal," *Short Times*, April 1970, Independent Voices.

U.S. in Vietnam – particularly against civilians – were coupled with broader critiques of corporate greed and baser motives in U.S. foreign policy. All these concerns, regularly surfaced in the columns of GI coffeehouse newspapers, signifying growing disapproval of American involvement in and beyond Vietnam.

Reflecting the growth of the antiwar movement, letters to the editors of the underground newspapers at GI coffee shops show the wide range of influence and support of the movement. The letters show large numbers of sympathetic readers willing to aid in the production of art and poetry, contribution of stories for newspaper issues, giving monetary donations to production, or by simply offering words of affirmation. One reader captured this spirit of open-ended support, writing, "If there is any way I can be of assistance, I am willing. Be it as a correspondent, reporter, reader, whatever…. I'll put all my powers at hand to make people aware."[21] Another enthused, "I'm enclosing a ten to help keep up the rag. I would also like to receive it as often as it is put out. I've shown a few issues around and everybody really digs it. So, whenever I hear anything interesting, I will convey it to you."[22] This reader offered monetary support, words of approval, and the promise to provide information. Immersion in coffeehouse newspapers also reveals that participating in activism gave readers and producers of the papers a sense of efficacy. One member of the *Fun Travel Adventure* staff admitted that he had wished he could be a part of something important because he wanted to do his share in society. He had that psychic need met by participating in the production of the newspaper, opining in the paper's columns that "I found that place where I could do my own thing. I found a place where I could

[21] "Letters to FTA," *Fun Travel Adventure*, August 26, 1968, Independent Voices.
[22] "Letters: Alaska," *Fun Travel Adventure*, November 1968, Independent Voices.

really do something. It is with *FTA*."[23] Many more similarly-themed letters of support appeared in the newspapers canvassed for this research.

Coffeehouse staff regularly printed letters to the editors at all three southern coffeehouse locations under discussion in this chapter, and almost every issue of the three southern coffeehouse newspapers examined contained a "Letters to the Editor" section. The amount of correspondence between members of the broader public and the underground newspapers show that while the extent of their reach and audience may be debatable and is almost impossible to document precisely, they were not an isolated group, hermetically sealed on from the broader society. In fact, they had support and roots in military and civilian society alike. A closer examination of the GI coffeehouses and their issues reveals what helped motivate participants in the coffeehouse movement to activism.

The occupational nature of being drafted into the military proved to be a galvanizing issue for coffeehouse activists and seeing servicemembers as laborers is essential to this argument.[24] Once it had drafted its servicemembers, the military assigned its members different jobs. They trained their new members in military basic training, paid them, and gave them benefits just like a civilian job. The structural hierarchy within the military was also comparable to any other job. The lower-ranking enlisted servicemembers can be seen as having functioned as the laborers and the officer class took on the supervisory positions of bosses. The difference between those being drafted in the military and those having a civilian occupation lay in the fact that drafted soldiers could not quit their job if they did not like their working conditions, nor

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[23] "Right on Brother!!" *Fun Travel Adventure*, January 1970, Independent Voices.
[24] For more information on defining servicemembers as workers please see Julie Green's book, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* in which she describes the building of the Panama Canal as a collective project on the part of people from around the world, civilians and servicemembers alike.

could they argue in most instances – individual or through collective bargaining – for better conditions. The unique working environment within the military reinforced the inability of servicemembers to control their working lives. This sense of a loss of efficacy led many servicemembers to think critically about their own rights – and the abridgment of them. It also led some would-be activists to be more open to perceiving evidence of racism and considering women's issues in the military. Many of these issues also surfaced regularly in the columns of the coffeehouse newspapers.

The UFO in downtown Columbia, South Carolina, not far from Fort Jackson, was the first GI coffeehouse. With a name strikingly similar to the USO, or the United Services Operation, a military-affiliated organization that provides services to servicemembers and their families, the UFO coffeehouse was a place that GIs could go for coffee, to read, to listen to music, or to simply have conversations with other individuals.. The UFO gave those who frequented it access to "underground papers, information on GI rights, free movies, cheap prices for good rock bands, posters on the walls, bagels and eggs, antiwar petitions, free thanksgiving dinners, kids walking around bare-footed, [and] a free record player."[25] It was a place where civilians, usually students from the University of South Carolina, and soldiers from the nearby military installation could go and share a common space. Inside the important shared space of the UFO Coffeehouse, these activists talked about pressing issues, planned rallies, and wrote articles for their coffeehouse's underground newspaper, *The Short Times*, named in tongue-in-cheek fashion after the euphemism of a person nearing the end of their period of military service. Ironically enough, this term also described someone who was at the end of their prison sentence.

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[25] "Up Against the Cell Block," *The Short Times*, May 1, 1970, Independent Voices.

Rights as U.S. citizens was an important umbrella issue to the editors and authors of *The Short Times*. Almost every edition of the newspaper began with this excerpt from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights 'guaranteed' by our constitution, that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."[26] This bold inclusion of the Declaration of Independence leads one to reasonably infer that the newspaper editors and coffeehouse activists felt they lacked these rights and sought to more fully realize them. This inclusion of patriotic language would have also been a way to protect themselves from dangerous allegations of subversive activity. They covered themselves in the language of nationalism to critique the nation and as a way to reclaim it again as their own.

The best example of their concern for rights is their documentation of the Ken Cross Case. On May 19, 1969, Private Ken Cross was rapping with a new group of trainees about the war, the brass, GI rights and passing around a copy of *The Short Times* when he received a Special Court Martial.[27] A member of the military faced a Special Court Martial when he or she broke any Army regulation or a Post Regulation, the penalty being six months in the stockade.[28] Cross received a sentence of six months of hard labor with solitary confinement.[29] This sentence hardly seemed fair if he was simply exercising his freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assembly, and the right to petition. However, Cross's status as an enlisted member of the U.S. Army during a time of war raised the question of whether his constitutional rights were

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[26] "What About the Withdrawal?" *The Short Times,* December 6, 1968, Independent Voices.
[27] In this case, the term "rap" does not refer to the musical artform in which words are recited rhythmically over a beat. Here, this term signifies an informal or unstructured group discussion. A "rap room" therefore, is a meeting space for such discussions. The term "brass" refers to the officer class of the military. "The Ken Cross Case," *The Short Times*, July 1, 1967, Independent Voices.
[28] "The Ken Cross Case," *The Short Times*, July 1, 1967, Independent Voices.
[29] "The First Amendment and Fort Jackson, SC," *The Short Times*, July 1, 1967, Independent Voices.

forfeit. Writers in *The Short Times* bemoaned the fact that the "freedom of speech, the press, assembly and the right to petition have all been violated at the military training reservation at Columbia, SC."[30] After negative publicity from the media and the circulation of a petition, the Army reduced Cross's sentence to two months hard labor without confinement."[31] In this instance, when the Army encroached on Ken Cross's rights, UFO Coffeehouse activists published the story in their newspaper, gained more media attention for the case, petitioned for his rights, and succeeded in lessening his punishment.

Another issue that UFO coffeehouse activists confronted on a regular basis was racism in the military. Racist accounts litter personal accounts from GIs who trained at Fort Jackson, especially in Roosevelt Gore's account. Gore disclosed that he reported to Fort Jackson for basic training and encountered a drill instructor who made his life miserable. He recounted that the drill instructor did not like blacks and that "he always picked on blacks, maybe because we was from the South and he considered us to be illiterate. He used to kick and spit on us, call us "n*****s" and say, 'All you black son-of-a-b****** are going to Vietnam.' He liked to order me to get down on all fours and pick up cigarette butts with my mouth."[32] Gore's testimony cast a searing spotlight on the racist practices of at least some personnel at Fort Jackson. First, African American GIs – especially those who trained in the South – were likely to experience racial discrimination by their white superiors. Second, racial discrimination could escalate to levels of verbal abuse and even physical violence. Finally, the fact that the superior officer threatened the men with going to Vietnam indicates that he held significant power, both

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[30] "The First Amendment and Fort Jackson, SC," The *Short Times*, July 1, 1967, Independent Voices.
[31] "The First Amendment and Fort Jackson, SC," The *Short Times*, July 1, 1967, Independent Voices.
[32] James R. Wilson, *Landing Zones: Southern Veterans Remember Vietnam*, "Roosevelt Gore" (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), 80.

psychologically and more existentially in terms of the potential to affect deployment orders –

over the people that he was training.

A similar account reaches *The Short Times* in a letter to the editors, linking race and labor

issues. An anonymous soldier assigned to the 138th MP Company at Fort Jackson described

living in the barracks and his daily work-life. He alleged that "black and brown GIs," African

Americans and Hispanics, lived in segregated barracks from whites." What was more

unbearable he said, "was the fact that they were working seven days a week at twelve hours per

day while the white worked eight hours per day for six out of nine days."[33] Not only were they

separated into living quarters by race, but they were also required to work longer hours. These

types of divisive methods had been used for centuries to control labor, and segregation had been

the fixed baseline in the American military until President Truman's Execute Order 9981 had

challenged to some extent age-old patterns in 1948. (It is worth noting that some unit-level

segregation was still in place even when the Korean War broke out in 1950, and that it would

take much more than an executive order to eradicate the sweeping legacy of discrimination in the

U.S. armed forces.) Still, the Fort Jackson MP's complaints were striking given that he was

alleging such practices in 1970. He concluded by saying that yes, "racism does exist in the

Army. It has always existed in the Army and under the present conditions will continue to exist

as long as the Army ignores the basic constitutional rights of all men."[34] Here, the anonymous

author managed to tie constitutional rights, issues of race, and worker's rights together to show

that they were all interconnected. One could not be changed without the other changing.

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[33] Letter to the editor, *The Short Times*, January 1, 1970, Independent Voices.
[34] Letter to the editor, *The Short Times*, January 1, 1970, Independent Voices.

Like the UFO in Columbia, South Carolina, the Haymarket Square Coffeehouse in Fayetteville, North Carolina provided the location for activists to unite. Named after one of the most unsettling labor riots in U.S. history, the significance of its name is apparent. In *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age American*, James Green argues that the Haymarket bombing in 1886 was a turning point in American history in which "Americans came to fear radicals and reformers as dangerous subversives and to view trade unionists as irresponsible troublemakers."[35] In other words, from that point on in American history – and some labor historians would argue well before 1886 – labor protesters staked out a menacing place in the minds of many Americans, often being seen as threatening and divisive. It could be argued that this is how coffeehouse activists at the Haymarket Square Coffeehouse saw themselves in the eyes of society. A radical bookstore and coffee shop outside of Fort Bragg, Haymarket Square was a place to sit and read, relax, rap, do crafts, and attend GI Union Meetings.[36] The location often featured rock-country, bluegrass, and folk-rock music and showed movies.[37] Additionally, servicemen and women, military families, and civilians of the community published an underground newspaper called the *Bragg Briefs*.[38] Like the UFO, the concerns of the activists at Haymarket Square included the oppressive nature of the military, racism, and also women's issues which all closely aligned with issues of labor.

The GIs of Fort Bragg and the civilians that supported them fought against the oppressive nature of the military and called for democracy in the Army. Like *The Short Times* published the UFO Coffeehouse outside of Fort Jackson in Columbia, the *Bragg Briefs* emphasized rights on

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[35] James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that divided Gilded Age America*, (New York: Anchor Books), 11.
[36] "Haymarket Closed," *Bragg Briefs*, May 1972, Independent Voices.
[37] "Grand Opening," *Bragg Briefs*, August 1970, Independent Voices.
[38] "Who We Are," *Bragg Briefs*, November 1, 1972, Independent Voices.

its front page even as title and its first issue's visual masthead graphic implicitly subverted

military decorum with its visual evocation of a GI's underwear. One headline read "*Bragg*

Briefs is published in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the United States

Constitution. It is a free press published by active duty GIs stationed at Fort Bragg, North

Carolina dedicated to the establishing responsible alternatives to the current military and

economic systems." [39] It is evident that military members were more than dissatisfied with the

lack of rights. In one issue of the *Bragg Briefs*, activists reported that "at least one GI has been

arrested for distributing subversive material when he passed out copies of the Bill of Rights."[40]

While this was likely an extreme case of the misuse of power, it shows the blatant infringement

of rights that was happening in the Army. AS noted above, passing out the Bill of Rights would

have helped to immunize GI activists against allegations of subversive, or Un-American activity.

Their primary organizational vehicle of activism was the Fort Bragg GI Union that held meetings

at the Haymarket Square Coffeehouse. Their goals included obtaining "the right to refuse illegal

orders—like the orders to fight in the illegal and imperialist war in Southeast Asia… no troops to

be used against workers on strike, no troops to be used against antiwar demonstrators, court-

martial juries made up of men from all ranks in proportion to their numbers, the right to free

political association and free speech on or off military property, the end to officially sanctioned

sexist oppression of women and gay people in the military community."[41] From this language,

one can assess that GI's involved in the coffeehouse movement believed the war in Vietnam was

an illegal war. They should not be used as a force to put down workers on strike and antiwar

demonstrators because that was directly impeding on those citizen's rights to assemble, speak,

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[39] "Who We Are," *Bragg Briefs*, November 1, 1972, Independent Voices.
[40] "The GI-Civilian Coffeehouse at Haymarket Square," *Bragg Briefs*, August 1970, Independent Voices.
[41] "Fort Bragg Servicemen Form Union," *Bragg Briefs*, November 1, 1971, Independent Voices.

and petition, and they believed in the protection of the rights of women and gays in the community.   The last two issues are especially noteworthy given the chronology of second wave feminism and the fact that in 1971 with the Stonewall Riots less than two years earlier the most visible manifestations of the lesbian and gay liberation movement were still in their relative infancy.

Furthermore, the above quotation speaks to the undercurrent of nationalism that swelled in some of the coffeehouses. By reclaiming their freedom of speech, refusing what they believed to be immoral orders, and speaking for the rights of women and gay members of the military community, servicemembers, in essence, reclaimed their identities as Americans and redefined their own form of nationalism – a nationalism tied to the American ideals of freedom and equality.

As had been in the case in Columbia in North Carolina's southern neighbor, issues related to racism also regularly cropped up in the pages of newspapers from Haymarket Square. One anonymous black member of the Army drew parallels between different protest movements and suggested their fundamental interconnectedness when he asserted that "if GIs can get together and protest Vietnam, then let that inspire GIs to get together and take care of racism."[42] If people could rally about their concerns about U.S. involvement in another country, they could certainly rally around the issue of racism within their own society. The writer suggested that soldiers, did not want to be used to put down protesters and demonstrators who were fighting for the same causes that they believed in, a timely concern in 1969 given the backdrop of urban disorders in the late 1960s and the deployment of National Guardsmen to the nation's inner

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[42] "A Black GI Speaks Out," *Bragg Briefs*, November 1969, Independent Voices.

cities. (The fatal shootings of four unarmed antiwar protesters at Kent State University less than six months after the African American letter-writer raised his concerns.)

What is worth noting is that at Fort Bragg the authorities admitted that there was a race problem in the Army. The *Bragg Briefs* reports that "the brass" held seminars to find out how extensive the problem was and how it could be solved.[43] One can assume that because of the dissent within the Army regarding racism and the activism of the GIs, civilians, and the underground newspaper at the local Haymarket Square Coffeehouse, dissenters brought racism to the forefront.

Activism on the behalf of and by women, as well as their involvement in labor issues make the Haymarket Square Coffeehouse unique. The women who played an important role in this coffeehouse were aware of the resistance around them and proclaimed that "the wives of servicemen have a definite and important role to play in that resistance." [44] A few of these women's concerns included the draft, low incomes, undue harassment of their husbands by military offices, and long waits at the Army hospital for birth control.[45] The Army wives acted as protectors of their families by advocating on behalf of their husbands by addressing low pay and work-place relationships, while also organizing on behalf of their children and for their own rights as women. Women were as much workers as men were.   As they contributed labor to the GI coffeehouse movement, women hosted talks with other wives, provided refreshments, and held craft workshops.[46] Acting as hosts during talks and coordinating craft workshops, the women played to their traditional roles of womanhood. They also canvassed, going door to door to inquire about the circumstances of other Army wives. Through door to door activism, they

[43] "Racial Seminars a Beginning?" *Bragg Briefs*, December 1969, Independent Voices.
[44] "A Word to the Wives: Married to the US Army?" *Bragg Briefs*, August 1970, Independent Voices.
[45] "A Word to the Wives: Married to the US Army?" *Bragg Briefs*, August 1970, Independent Voices.
[46] "GI Wives Demand Better Health Care," *Bragg Briefs*, December 1971, Independent Voices.

discovered that almost no one was happy with the health-care that they received from the military. Their grievances included the inefficiency of the system in that it took too long to receive care and sometimes they did not even receive adequate care.[47] The labor that these women provided to the GI coffeehouse movement offers conclusive evidence that the GI movement was not only a male movement, but that women had a significant role to play within their families and also within the larger coffeehouse movement, particularly as it pertained to labor.

The prominence of labor as an issue for coffeehouse activists is most apparent in a letter to the editor of *Bragg Briefs*. Mark Rovick invokes a call to action:

> If you care about changing the system so that it can no longer send us to die in an immoral war waged to increase the profits of Big Business, if you care about ending the b******* from the brass that has reduced us to the level slaves without the right to protest the conditions that enslave us, then you will attend the next GI's United meeting this Tuesday at Haymarket Square and every Tuesday. GI's United is the only hope the GI's have and it will die a quick death if you don't get involved and turn GI's United into a strong and active political force.[48]

In this evocative quotation with its sense of existential urgency, Mr. Rovick denounces the role of business in the war in Vietnam and highlighted the working conditions within the Army as comparable to slavery. The emphasis that the writer placed on the officer class oppressing the enlisted class and his comparison of the working conditions to slavery revealed the underlying labor tensions. The solution that he offered was to unify with other organizers through GI's United.

The Cellar Coffeehouse in Muldraugh, outside of Fort Knox in Louisville, Kentucky is the final establishment that this chapter will address. Like the other coffeehouses in this work, the Cellar Coffeehouse was a hangout spot for civilians and GIs. However, this coffeehouse also

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[47] "GI Wives Demand Better Health Care," *Bragg Briefs*, December 1971, Independent Voices.
[48] Mark A. Rovick, "Letters to the Editors," Bragg Briefs, April 1971, Independent Voices.

provided military counseling through the GI Legal Defense Committee for GIs who sought

discharge or needed legal means to defend themselves against the Army.[49] Kentucky

coffeehouse activists also printed GI's legal rights in The Cellar's underground newspaper called

Fun Travel Adventure.[50] Shortened to *FTA*, the newspapers' name had a double meaning that

translated to F*** the Army. Vulgarities aside, activists at this location were otherwise careful

to maintain a respectable public image by forbidding the use of drugs and the selling of alcohol

and banning fights on the premises. One of the newspaper issues boiled things down to their

essence, "there is only one rule at the Coffeehouse: No drugs, liquor or fights."[51] Coffeehouse

activists no doubt realized that they were already a military and police target for their activism

and that the authorities would like nothing better than to have an excuse to close their location.

 Fun Travel Adventure demonstrated coffeehouse activists' concern for soldiers' rights

within the Army much in the way that *The Short Times* and *Bragg Briefs* did. The words

"Dedicated to Free Speech and the Struggle for our Rights" spread across the paper directly

below the paper's title. Demonstrating the same line of thought, one soldier claimed that "if you

and I are going to fight for freedom, equality and democracy I think we need to start somewhere

else besides Nam."[52] Dedicated to combatting the stripping of soldiers' rights, the *FTA*

published exposé-like coverage of a laundry list of prohibited training practices such as hazing,

use of abusive language, yelling at trainees, use of profanity, use of provocative language, mass

punishment, physical punishment, conducting an activity without adequate safeguard to life and

limb, and intimidating trainees in an effort to prevent their voicing complaints to commanders,

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[49] "What is FTA?" *Fun Travel Adventure*, April 1971, Independent Voices.
[50] "FTA Program," *Fun Travel Adventure*, June 1970, Independent Voices.
[51] "GI Coffee House Opens," *Fun Travel Adventure*, August 1, 1968, Independent Voices.
[52] "Are Rules for Trainees Only?" *Fun Travel Adventure*, June 23, 1968, Independent Voices.

the Inspector General, or other agencies.[53] According to the newspaper, soldiers faced all of these violations and many of them were not aware that these were prohibited training tactics. Considered more simply, they were essentially protested their working conditions.

The Cellar's activists also sought to educate its readers on the rights of the Constitution given to United States citizens. One writer to the editor applauded the inclusion of the Constitution and emphasized that the freedom of speech and the press are part of the inalienable rights that the Constitution mentions, and that "it does not say 'except soldiers,' 'except hippies,' or except 'negroes.' It says everybody. 'That is the naturalized Puerto Rican, the private in basic, the Indian, the Jew, and the Negro.'"[54] From this citation it is apparent that the lack of rights for soldiers and resistance led to the focus on rights for minorities in the Army.

As was the case with the coffeehouse newspaper published near Fort Jackson and Fort Bragg, when it came to fighting racism the issues of *Fun Travel Adventure,* were filled with descriptions of instances of discrimination and of minorities' desire for equality. In dated language, one article averred that "the stockades to which they send soldiers, treat Blacks, Latins, and Orientals brought before them condescendingly and often dispense the law cruelly."[55] Writers of the newspaper were aware that minorities faced imprisonment in disproportionate numbers to whites. They felt it their duty to protect soldiers from the discrimination that happened in the army and to motivate them to go to the coffeehouses to be exposed to new information.[56] To combat racism, the activists at The Cellar developed the FTA Program, an organization that claimed to want "GIs to overcome their racism and support Blacks, Latin-

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[53] "Things Trainees Should Know," *Fun Travel Adventure*, August 3, 1968, Independent Voices.
[54] Letter to the editor, *Fun Travel Adventure*, November 1968, Independent Voices.
[55] "Racism—Army Style," *Fun Travel Adventure*, November 1970, Independent Voices.
[56] "Right on Brother!!" *Fun Travel Adventure*, January 1970, Independent Voices.

Americans and Asians who are the leaders of a world-wide struggle to gain freedom, equality, and a better standard of living for all races."[57] In the civilian world, they wanted the freedom to "be able to walk down the street and be looked at as a human being; not as a freak because of the color of skin. To be able to go to decent schools that offer a good education and then on to decent jobs that pay decent wages to take us out of the ghettos and into decent neighborhoods."[58] Injustices and inequality within the military caused civilians and soldiers alike to mobilize, as they sought to make a better world within and outside of the military.

One thing that made the coffeehouse in Muldraugh unique was that it was a stopping place for draftees who had not yet reported for duty and deserters on the way to Canada. John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin, authors of the article "The Not so Silent Minority: Louisville's Antiwar Movement 1966-1975," assert that the coffeehouse was part of a system of coffeehouses that functioned as an Underground Railroad to Canada.[59] The underground newspapers do not indicate that harboring runaway servicemembers occurred, but this may be due to the fact that they do not want to bring attention to themselves. By documenting that sort of activity, they would be putting the individuals they were protecting as well as the coffeehouse in danger from local authorities and outsiders who opposed the coffeehouse movement.

To outsiders looking in, the coffeehouse movement in the American South was something strange, and unquestionably detrimental to society. One movement outsider, Detective John Earl Dennis, a southern white native of South Carolina was one of the police

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[57] "One, Two, Many HQ 3's," *Fun Travel Adventure*, May 1970, Independent Voices.
[58] "Right on Brother!!" *Fun Travel Adventure*, January 1970, Independent Voices.
[59] John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin, "The Not so Silent Minority: Louisville's Antiwar Movement, 1966-1975," *Journal of Southern History,* 73 no. 1 (February 2007): 116.

detectives investigating the UFO coffeehouse in Columbia, South Carolina for subversive activity, told the *New York Times*, "the type of people [the coffeehouse] draws may be good people," he said, "but they are different. Their attire is strange. There are tables for seating, but sometimes they sit on the floor, holding hands. It's a terrible situation."[60] For this detective, the trouble with the local coffeehouse came from the fact that its occupants were a little "different." To him, the coffeehouse and its patrons were a dark blot on the image of the capital city of Columbia. Located in Columbia's downtown the detective was probably worried about the coffeehouse's effect on the surrounding community.

The officer class, representatives of the federal government, and state and local authorities viewed the movement as an un-American, oppositional force to the war effort that was bad for local communities. It is important to note that the sources do not clearly document that those who made clear their opposition to the coffeehouse movement were against the social issues per se that insiders were promoting. Instead, their primary objection appears to have been that they felt coffeehouse activists through their efforts were subverting the mission in Vietnam. To them, the war cause was essential to containing communism and was of the utmost importance and the GI coffeehouse movement's adherents made no attempt to disguise their fundamental opposition to the war.

While coffeehouses organized around social issues with class at the center, outsiders organized in a form of their own and responded with fear, antagonism, and intimidation. One activist from the UFO coffeehouse told the *New York Times* that the army and local officials had worked together to harass the coffeehouse and that the organizers were being prosecuted for

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[60] Donald Janson, "Antiwar Coffeehouses Delight GI but Not His Army Superiors," *New York Times*, August 12, 1968.

holding unpopular views.[61] When comparing these descriptions to the language of how the

coffeehouses describe themselves, the contrast is striking. On the one hand the GI coffeehouse

activist describe their meeting places as relaxed atmospheres where people could hang out and

discuss current events. Outsiders, on the other hand, viewed these locations as "cesspools of

evil."[62] Where such a dramatic difference in perception originates can be simplified to the

backgrounds of the individuals who have the starkly divergent perceptions. An examination of

the letters to the editors of GI coffeehouse newspapers afford a clearer look into the varied

responses to individual coffeehouses by those who would define themselves as outsiders or

insiders in relation to the coffeehouse movement.

The UFO Coffeehouse at Fort Jackson exemplifies a stark division between insider and

outsider perspectives of the GI coffeehouse movement. Under close surveillance by the local

police, local officials and military officials saw the nearby coffeehouse as a danger to the war

effort and believed that the UFO had exhorted soldiers to disobey orders and was encouraging

them not to fight for their country.[63] In the *Investigation of Attempts to Subvert the United States

Armed Services*, Eugene Taylor, former U.S. Army counterintelligence analyst testified to

Congress about what he believed to be the role of the coffeehouse movement. He described the

activities of the coffeehouses as "subliminal subversion" admitting that the coffeehouse activist

did not say "Do not obey your sergeants," but admitted that they did say things such as "All

sergeants are dumb; Officers have privileges you don't have; why should you do this, why

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[61] "Six-Year Sentences Given to 3 Owners of G.I. Coffeehouse," *New York Times*, April 29, 1970.
[62] "Six-Year Sentences Given to 3 Owners of G.I. Coffeehouse," *New York Times*, April 29, 1970.
[63] The similarities between the surveillance of the GI coffeehouse movement and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense are striking. See, for example, Waldo Martin and Joshua Bloom, *Black Against Empire*: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party (Oakland: The University of California Press, 2013).

should you do that?"[64] From his point of view, the GI coffeehouses, while perhaps not explicitly subversive, could be seen as covertly working to undermine the U.S. military. The coffeehouse activists themselves denied any claims of illegal activities, but a sign on the wall inviting people to take advantage of counseling sessions, information on desertion, emigration, medical discharge, legal rights, and legal aid suggested that the suspicions of the UFO critics were not entirely unfounded.[65] Taylor addressed the advertisements of counseling sessions and the dissemination of information by implying that activists were doing they do more than counsel people at the coffeehouses. Specifically, he stated, "they not only counsel people concerning their legal rights in the military, but they also propagandize them with communist propaganda."[66]

During a time when Americans were becoming more and more divided in terms of how they felt about U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam, prowar advocates saw any opposition to that cause – and potentially even any questioning of the assumptions underpinning American policymakers' justification of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia – as dangerous to the overall war effort. A location such an antiwar coffeehouse located just miles away from the gates of Fort Jackson was for some a dark blot on the reputation of the city of Columbia, symbolically all the more important due to its location as the capital of South Carolina and seat of state government.

The local police acknowledged the sense of embarrassment that outsiders felt about the coffeehouse movement in an account by Fred Hoffman.   His account speaks to the underlying fears of the Army. He said, "they [coffeehouse organizers] can range from a clear danger by

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[64] United States, Congress, House, Committee on Internal Security, *Investigation of the Attempts to Subvert the United States Armed Services,* Parts 1-2: Hearings, Ninety-second Congress, first-second session, 6852, ProQuest.
[65] "Students and Soldiers Protest Closing of Antiwar Coffeehouse," *New York Times*, January 19, 1970.
[66] Committee on Internal Security, *Investigation of the Attempts to Subvert the United States Armed Services*, 6875, ProQuest.

getting more people to commit disloyal acts, down to being a source of embarrassment and irritation to the Army—which is where we are now."[67] At the start, the coffeehouse movement posed no real threat and was simply a source of annoyance for the Army. In the Investigation of Attempts to Subvert the United States Armed Services, retired Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall reflected this sentiment that the coffeehouses were nothing more than a nuisance to the military that would have "[had] a very minor debilitating effect and I would not go beyond that."[68] Put more plainly, the GI coffeehouse were nothing to worry about. Most officers did not want their soldiers frequenting these locations, however, because it made the military look weak and suggested they could not maintain control of its servicemembers. What would the Army and other military branches have to fear? They believed there were real dangers in division and in the spread of communism.

This fear is evident in the language that many of the newspapers used when referring to the locations and those frequenting those locations. "They're all communists in there," one observer noted in a *New York Times* piece on "antiwar coffeehouses" published late in the summer of 1968.[69] Harry T. Snipe, chief of detectives in Columbia, South Carolina at the time, believed that the local GI coffeehouse was "a communist front."[70] He also added that "I think they're terrible. They have a slouchy, beatnik crowd. I've never been used to anything like that."[71] With this quotation one can see the fear of "the other." Because patrons of UFO

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[67] Fred Hoffman, "Militant Leftists Give Army Trouble," *El Paso Times*, Sunday, July 20, 1969, Newspapers.com.
[68] Committee on Internal Security, *Investigations of Attempts to Subvert the United States Armed Services*, 7006, ProQuest.
[69] Donald Janson, "Antiwar Coffeehouses Delight G.I.'s but Not Army: Antiwar Coffeehouses Delight G.I. but Not His Army Superiors," *New York Times,* August 12, 1968.
[70] Donald Janson, "Antiwar Coffeehouses Delight GI but Not His Army Superiors," *New York Times,* August 12, 1968.
[71] Donald Janson, "Antiwar Coffeehouses Delight GI but Not His Army Superiors," *New York Times*, August 12, 1968.

coffeehouse were not conforming to what the citizens of Columbia saw as "normal," their critics demonized the group and placed them into the same category as communists and others deemed to be politically and culturally subversive.

Expanding on this fear of communism, local authorities were afraid that the spread of communism through the activities of the GI coffeehouse activists would have a deleterious effect on the local youth. An account of State Circuit Judge E. Harry Agnew's response to the UFO revealed that in his opinion "even though the men were convicted of a common lot misdemeanor he could not overlook the influence that defendants could have over so many young people." As a result, the owners of the UFO coffeehouse received six years in prison for running what the court considered a "nuisance" to society. (It goes without saying that a six year sentences is an inordinately punitive for a misdemeanor offense, but it spoke to fundamental anxieties about the significance and subversive potential of coffeehouse-based activism.) Agnew went on to say, "I have great fear for what is in store for this country and I wonder where we're headed, what the future holds for our own children. I certainly hope they will not come under the influence of people who went to the UFO."[72] Within this quotation, one can sense the fear that the circuit judge has of the coffeehouse and its activists. To him, the GI coffeehouse was a danger both to the country and to the country's youth, suggesting anxieties about a generational divide in support for America's involvement in and beyond Vietnam.

Agnew's response offered a vivid example of another concrete result that often grew out of the fear of the GI coffeehouse movement, namely the imprisonment of its activists. An instance of the military feeling threatened by the coffeehouse movement is evident in this same

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[72] "Six-Year Sentences Given to 3 Owners of G.I. Coffeehouse," *New York Times*, April 29, 1970.

harsh court sentencing. For instance, Herald Muskat, one of the organizers of the UFO

coffeehouse received a court martial and a sentence of six months hard labor for unauthorized

distribution of underground newspapers.[73] Moreover, the "stockades [were] so packed with

prisoners that sentences [were] often to be cut in half." [74] The military feared the disruption and

the unrest that GI activists caused, so much so that they chose to imprison individuals in

opposition to the war.

Behind the harsh sentences for coffeehouse activists by both military and civilian justice

systems lay a steady drumbeat of fear that the antiwar activism would hinder the war effort and

sow division within the armed forces. Some military officials also professed anxiety about the

spread of communism which appeared to them to be a potent virus circulating within the

coffeehouse movement. Together these fears resulted in panic and oppression of those involved

in the coffeehouse movement, through intimidation oppression and harassment on the part of the

high-ranking military officials and local authorities. While those involved in the movement and

those opposed to the movement seldom saw eye to eye on the significance of what the GI

coffeehouse movement was actually doing, the tensions between the two sides inevitably

exacerbated the tensions within the military during that time which in turn heightened class

divisions within the service and caused ideological divisions within the coffeehouse movement.

One anonymous author pens a letter to the editors of *Bragg Brief* titled "An Open Letter

to my Father" and sees the coffeehouse movement as a positive force even though he himself is

an outsider of the movement. However, his account still shows where the divide lay between

those involved in the movement and those opposed to the movement. The letter-writer's father

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[73]"An Antiwar Soldier Sentenced in Fort Dix," *New York Times*, August 10, 1969.
[74] Robert Sherrill, "Must the Citizen Give Up His Civil Liberties When He Joins the Army?" *New York Times,* May 18, 1969.

had said to his son, "Young people today…seem dissatisfied with things that have been accepted as typically American for years. Why is that?" With this remark the father made a clear delineation between the son's generation and his own generation. The son's response was even more telling and divisive: "What is 'typically American' and 'normal' to you is not the same for me. Your concept of Americanism was formulated under drastically different conditions than those which have influenced me. You grew up in a pre-nuclear age; your impressions about this land and its ideas were firmly established long before the first atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima." He concluded, "No, my father, we are not renouncing the America you love, for we have never known that America; it no longer exists. And the America that does exist is in a state of steady decay."[75] Here, the author of the letter posited a distinction between the America that existed during the older and younger generation a difference that carried over to the younger individuals involved in the GI coffeehouse movement and the older generation whose members were seldom if ever involved in the coffeehouse movement. The author perceived the older generation as blind to the fact that the imagined America that servicemembers were in Vietnam fighting for, in their minds, no longer existed in the same uncomplicated fashion in the minds of the new generations. In his eyes, society was in decline because of the war and inequalities in society. To his father, society was in decline because of people like his son who were not conforming to the status quo. There was a yawning and potentially irreconcilable chasm between those two perspectives.

Andrew Love, an individual who did not claim to be associated with the military, demonstrated his disgust for the coffeehouse and their newspapers in a letter to the editor he submitted for publication in the *Short Times*. At the core of his opposition to the coffeehouse

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[75] "Letters: An Open Letter to my Father," *Bragg Briefs*, February 1970, Independent Voices.

network was his perception that the nation needed protection from coffeehouse activists. "Left-wing militant groups" "fighting for their rights," he averred, "spread violence and destruction over public and private property in cities and on campuses" and that they used their "freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly to the full extent to destroy the country which protects these rights."[76] As apparent in this quotation, Mr. Love viewed the coffeehouse activists as unnecessarily "fighting for their rights" and in turn "destroy[ing] the country," more specifically the military, by doing so. What Mr. Love failed to realize was that from the perspective of the coffeehouse activists and many others, the military and the country itself existed so that people could fully exercise their rights. To him, people's rights existed and were to be protected only to the extent that they did not interfere with his notions of tradition. This was the crux of the disconnect between him and the coffeehouse activists. To him, rights had limits, but to coffeehouse organizers, rights were limitless.

Similarly, one young woman, Mrs. M. A. Dey, no more than thirty years old, also had an opinion about the local coffeehouse and their goals. She wrote, "Your demands are absolutely stupid! They remind me of some I once read in a black panther paper. But they are much more sickening because you are supposed to be fighting for America and being Americans."[77] It does not require much reading between the lines to infer her feelings about the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and perhaps African Americans more broadly, but her implicit suggestion that "fighting for America" meant abandoning fundamental constitutional rights is striking. Her response equated organizing against the war and speaking out about injustices within the military as being un-American. In her eyes, because the drafted servicemembers are organizing and

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[76] Andrew Love, "Letter to the Editors: Love It or Leave It?" *Short Times*, 1970, Independent Voices.
[77] Mrs. M. A. Dey, "Letters," *Short Times*, September 30, 1970, Independent Voices.

opposing the war, they were not doing their primary civic duty fighting for their country. To servicemembers though, opposing a war that they did not support and improving their country by promoting liberty for all was a responsibility in and of itself. The disconnect between insiders and outsiders was again, revealing.

Insiders and outsiders also had differing opinions on the coffeehouse movement in Muldraugh, Kentucky. Local police forces and military officials referred to coffeehouse activists as "communist agitators" who were conducting a public nuisance. Furthermore, the author of a *New York Times* article wrote about the coffeehouse activists as if they were protesting merely for the sake of being protesters. He described coffeehouse activists as "antiwar, anti-Army, anti-nearly everything group of outlanders."[78] One unique aspect of The Cellar Coffeehouse in Muldraugh was that a handful of commissioned officers evidently frequented this location. At some of the other coffeehouses that this work addresses, officers were the antagonists of enlisted personnel in the underground press and were generally outsiders in terms of their relationship to the coffeehouse movement.[79]

In other instances, the opinions of members of the officer class were abundantly clear. One Senior Master Sergeant wrote to the *Bragg Briefs* to express his disgust for the Haymarket Coffeehouse and its underground press production. He referred to having seen an issue of the paper on the latrine floor of a beer joint and stated, "that is where it belonged." He followed up that statement by establishing his bona fides, referencing his "25 year service to my country!"[80] In this letter-writer's worldview, having risen through the ranks over more than two decades

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[78] "War Foes Yield on Coffeehouse: Agree to Shut Place in Town Surrounded by Fort Knox," *New York Times*, July 19, 1970.
[79] It would be fascinating to know more about the opinions of members of "the brass" who mixed with discontented soldiers in Kentucky, but regrettably no sources shed light on this potentially intriguing dynamic.
[80] Joe Searcy, "Letters," *Bragg Briefs*, 1975, Independent Voices.

generated a sense of pride coupled with the perception that the underground newspaper and the coffeehouse activists who produced it were somehow working to undercut the significance and legitimacy of his lengthy military service. He was emphatically opposed to soldiers organizing against the military.

In contrast, in another letter published by the editors of *Bragg Briefs,* an anonymous author writing from Vietnam, provided an alternate version to the perspective of classes pitted against one another.   The author wrote about his friend who happened to be an officer and said, "[he] could talk and communicate with the guys who worked for him, and he wasn't proud. He'd get down and work right along with everyone else at a job."[81] This description shows that there were not always clearly drawn lines between the enlisted and officer classes of the military, as many insiders of the coffeehouse movement would argue.

Aside from this fluidity of class roles that this source revealed, the underground newspapers are also revealing for their silences, in terms of topics their coverage largely omitted. Surprisingly, the underground newspapers by and large did not provide the expected adamant draft opposition. The draft was simply not the focus of the newspapers. An explanation for this omission may be that the draft was to most GI coffeehouse activists an issue of the past. Most activists had already been drafted – some of them had already returned from combat deployments – so perhaps they felt that little or nothing could be done. In a sense, that die had been cast, and the constituency they sought to reach was primarily enlisted personnel. The large antiwar movement, after all, was focused with laser beam precision on the issue of the draft, so perhaps a diversity of aims and goals in terms of prioritizing targets is not entirely surprising.

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[81] "Letters from Nam," *Bragg Briefs*, June 1970, Independent Voices.

Another explanation for the absence of antidraft material in the underground newspapers could be that activists believed that the draft was a necessary institution for the security of the nation. Yet another possibility is that they felt that the more specific issues they chose to address were even more important. Conscription may have been an early cause for concern, but the focus of coffeehouse activism became much more specific. Activists claimed rights for soldiers in the army, opposed racism, demanding withdrawal from the war, and argued for solutions to women's issues.

By focusing on the issues that they chose to address, they improved the institution of the selective service one issue at a time. In turn, they improved their working conditions one issue at a time. By exposing soldiers' lack of rights in the military and demanding those very rights, they would make the service better for those involved. By opposing racism, especially within the military, coffeehouse activists made service more inclusive of people of color and less demeaning for them. In demanding U.S. military withdrawal from Southeast Asia, activists displayed their opposition less to U.S. involvement in the war per se than and more specifically to the less noble motives that they believed undergirded U.S. involvement. This also fit hand in glove with the ethos of the coffeehouses which was to "support the troops" even if that meant "bringing them home." Finally, by addressing the issues that women had with the military, the coffeehouse activists promoted the improvement of family life and health care.

The diversity of the issues, being that they crossed class, gender, and racial boundaries led to a diversity of people called to activism. These findings support David Parsons's argument in *Dangerous Grounds*, that the GI coffeehouse movement in the U.S. Sought brought together civilians and servicemembers alike to unify in unprecedented ways. GI coffeehouses gave activists and potential movement recruits a location to meet, and the underground newspapers

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provided a medium to communicate their concerns. Based on the issues that GI coffeehouse

activists addressed such as rights for soldiers, racism in the military and in society, issues of the

family and healthcare, the desire for withdrawal from the war, as well as the lack of

communication about dissent for conscription, the underground newspapers reveal that while the

draft was a motivating factor for most soldiers' dissent of the war, the driving force behind

coffeehouse activism was the environment in which it developed. The coffeehouse and

underground newspaper contribution to the GI movement may not have been possible were it not

for the influences of the social movements that preceded it and continued to unfold and evolve

around the activists. The civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the feminist

movement and the strides they made toward equality inspired civilians and GIs to mobilize

against another foe: the US Army.

As they came together against this new common enemy, all the while crossing boundaries

of race, gender, and class, activists began to cross other boundaries as well. The coffeehouse

movement expanded outside of the Army into other branches of the military including the

Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Navy. Crossing regional boundaries, the movement

spread outside of the South to states such as California and Hawaii, and even transcended

national borders as new GI coffeehouses opened their doors in countries like Canada, Germany,

and Japan. As the coffeehouse movement spread further and further outside of the South and

even blurred state and national boundaries, it nevertheless maintained a distinct connection

between activists around the globe through its newspaper network. This informational

connection and sense of unity created a growing discussion of class-based politics throughout the

military and around the globe, and the potential for a class-based solidarity was even more

central to the activists' preoccupations in this second group of coffeehouses than it had been in

the American South.

Chapter 2

The GI Coffeehouse Movement Westward and Abroad: Together but Worlds Apart

Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California erupted into chaos on May 22, 1971 with fighting, a fire, mass arrests, multiple injuries, and one death. According to the officers and the mainstream press, the incident was billed as a "race riot" resulting from growing racial tensions on the base. The airmen who were involved in the uprising, however, told a different and more complex story. According to them, the conflict began the previous night with an altercation between white and black airmen. When the two black airmen involved in the fight were thrown into the stockade, 100 of the enlisted servicemen, both blacks and whites, formed a coalition to demand the release of the two men.[82] During the uprising, security forces arrested one hundred and thirty five people, and beat ten people with one victim dying from injuries he received in the melee. On the same evening, protesters burned the Bachelor Officer Quarters to the ground and dragged a colonel from his car, physically assaulting him. There was a bomb scare a few short days later at the Passenger Terminal where troops prepared to embark for Vietnam.[83]

In an article written more than four decades after the incidents, Mark Wilderman, the 60th Mobility Wing historian, attributed the violence of that day to social differences. He admits, "It's hard to put different people together… You get someone from the city and put them with someone from an impoverished area who are being drafted into the military at this time and don't really want to be there anyway, it spells trouble."[84] This account reasonably leads the readers to believe that the events on base that day were a result of tensions between individual airmen.

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[82] "GI's Unit and Riot at Travis AFB," *Navy Times are Changing*, June 1, 1971, Independent Voices.
[83] "Travis AFB Explodes," *News and Discussion Bulletin,* May 1, 1971, Independent Voices.
[84] Nicole Leidholm, "Race Riots Shape Travis' History," *Travis Air Force Base News*, November 8, 2013, https://www.travis.af.mil/News/Article/768141/race-riots-shape-travis-history/.

While it is likely that some of the problems on the base that day did arise from differences within the enlisted force, it is more accurate to attribute the explosive tensions and ultimate "riot" to tensions between GI activists and their officer class "bosses." One letter to the editor of *Travisty,* the newspaper associated with the Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse supports this claim when it points out that "the straight press released stories of racial incidents which were given to them by the brass here on base. These reports gave the appearance of a lack of unity between the black and white brothers and sisters and their inability to work toward a common goal."[85] Additionally, one airman said "Whites and Blacks we're all in the same bag. The difference is between us and officers." This quotation and the "riot" at Travis Air Force Base show that class distinctions within the military motivated the attack.

A letter to the editors of *Travisty* further reveals more about misconceptions of GI coffeehouse movement outsiders. Wallace J. Long wrote a letter to the editors of *Travisty* stating that the language that they used in their newspaper advocated violence and was "cliché propaganda" that "will succeed in the alienation [of] those in power, whom you most need to reach."[86] In other words, from the perception of an outsider, the Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse and the media that it produced was too radical and would not have achieve anything sustainable. The response from the *Travisty* newspaper editorial staff showed the disconnect between the outsider and the insider's perspective. They argued that "those in power are already alienated from the people, that's how they maintain powerful positions. We are not trying to reach those in power. *Travisty* is for the people who have yet to realize their power, a tool to help bring us all together to collectively seize the power which should be in the people's hands."[87]

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[85] "Come Together" *Travisty*, 1971. Independent Voices.
[86] Wallace J. Long, "Letter to the editor," *Travisty*, 1971, Independent Voices.
[87] Wallace J. Long, "Letter to the editor," *Travisty*, 1971, Independent Voices.

Coffeehouse activists' perspectives were the opposite of what Mr. Long was asserting, just as their stances about the riot differed from the mainstream media.

In fact, some servicemen and women at Travis Air Force Base and members of the GI movement on military installations around the world had by the time of the "riot" developed a sense of class-based politics that crossed race and gender lines, and this consciousness fueled an opposition to leadership. For instance, one servicewoman urged, "Remember that we are workers, just like civilian workers all over the world. We have the right to be treated like other human beings. You gain power through unity and with power you cannot be stepped on or ignored. POWER THROUGH UNITY! POWER TO THE PEOPLE!"[88] The question that emerges, then, is how did class-based politics develop? Where did this solidarity come from? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

Out of the growing dissent of the war, GI coffeehouse activists, comprised of diverse races, men, women, civilians, GIs, and draft deserters organized dissent against the Vietnam War by rallying support for an array of issues including GI rights in the military, racism, and women's issues. GI coffeehouses gave them a location to meet, and their underground newspapers gave them a means to communicate. In turn, these activists used the coffeehouses and their publications and constructed their own communities away from the military culture that had exiled and isolated them. The meeting houses, often coffeehouses, encouraged community building on the local level while the newspapers created international community networks, resulting in the making of a military working-class solidarity.

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[88] Andrea D. Sternberg, "Enlisted People's Victory," *Liberated Barracks*, October-November 1973, Independent Voices.

Essential to the development of this military equivalent of working-class unity was the intrinsically-embedded issue of class. As Christian Appy writes, roughly 80 percent of servicemembers during the Vietnam War came from working-class or poor backgrounds.[89] Appy brings the reader to the realization that the war was fought by the children of "waitresses, factory workers, truck drivers, secretaries, firefighters, carpenters, custodians, police officers, salespeople, clerks, mechanics, miners, and farmers."[90] Working-class men were also more likely to be drafted than their middle-to-upper class counter parts. The draft, school programs, and the job market pushed many of the working-class to join the war while their more well-to-do counterparts were better able to avoid the fight through various draft deferments and more extreme forms of draft-dodging.[91] As a result, many of the individuals making up the GI coffeehouse movement also came from working-class backgrounds. Moreover, class intersected with issues of gender and race within the Vietnam era military. African American men and women did many of the unskilled jobs in the service with little to no opportunity for career advancement. From this perspective, GI coffeehouse activism, a movement that claimed to be dedicated to improving circumstances in the military by fighting racism and improving conditions for women, appeared to be a positive force in society. How exactly did race, gender, and class intersect in the history of the coffeehouse movement?

Historians have for at least the last quarter century grappled with the role of U.S. servicemen and women in the antiwar/peace movement. Images of war-battered soldiers being spat on and college campus riots come to mind when thinking about antiwar activism. Jerry Lembcke's work, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* attempts to

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[89] Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 6.
[90] Appy, *Working-Class War*, 7.
[91] Appy, *Working-Class War*, 6.

grapple with myth the of the Vietnam Veteran being spat on and argues that there is no evidence

to prove that any such thing occurred. Rather, the media – particularly popular culture –

perpetuated this idea. Richard R. Moser offers another look at military members' role in the

antiwar movement in his work, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the*

Vietnam War, in which he argues that "antiwar soldiers and veterans, inspired by the social and

cultural upheavals that created the war's context, produced a new cultural form of immense

historical importance—the figure of the new winter soldier."[92] Essentially, antiwar activists

reconstructed the American war hero and created a new model of "citizen activism for peace,

empowerment, and justice" made emblematic in groups like Vietnam Veterans Against the War

(VVAW).[93] The real savior was a soldier who ironically advocated for peace.

Yet another work that attempts to address the Vietnam antiwar movement is *Hardhats,*

Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory by Penny Lewes

challenges the idea that the antiwar movement was predominantly defined by leadership elite

college students by asserting that a "working-class opposition to the war was significantly more

widespread than it is remembered, and parts of the movement found roots in working-class

communities and politics."[94]

A final historiographical discussion shows the significant role that the topic of

nationalism played in the GI coffeehouse movement. In his *American Crucible: Race and*

Nation in the Twentieth Century, Gary Gerstle argues that "civic nationalism" and "racial

nationalism" have decisively shaped the history of the United States.[95] More specifically,

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[92] Richard R. Mosier, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 1.
[93] Moser, *The New Winter Soldier*, 1.
[94] Penny Lewes, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: the Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 5.
[95] Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.

Gerstle states that by the Vietnam era the two ideas of nationalism had torn the nation apart, and "neither the civic nor racial traditions of American nationalism retained enough integrity to serve as rallying points for those who wished to put the nation back together."[96] Despite these two forms of nationalism losing traction in the broad American society, within the context of the GI coffeehouse movement, activists began to rally around a new form of nationalism – one that they created on their own – in an attempt to reclaim their identity as Americans.

As noted above, what has largely escaped historical attention is a smaller and quite active movement within the antiwar organizations known as the GI coffeehouse movement. The coffeehouses and newspapers they produced beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the early 1970s had a significant impact on the development of the antiwar movement.[97] As detailed in Chapter 1 above, surprisingly, some of the most active establishments were in the South, a presumed prowar region of the United States long assumed to have been nearly uniformly "prowar." Situated in close proximity to U.S. Army bases in the South, The UFO in Columbia, South Carolina (Fort Jackson); the Haymarket Square Coffeehouse in Fayetteville, North Carolina, (Fort Bragg); and the Cellar Coffeehouse in Muldraugh, Kentucky (Fort Knox) underscore that the civil rights movement, black power movement, and feminist movement inspired civilians and GIs to mobilize against a common foe: the US Army. These findings support and expand upon the conclusions drawn by Parsons and Lewes provided in their examinations of coffeehouse activism and the underground press. As America's military involvement in Southeast Asia reached its bloody nadir the coffeehouse movement expanded

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[96] Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 10.
[97] For more information on the Vietnam Antiwar Movement please see Adam Garfinkle's *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* and Michael S. Foley's *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War.*

beyond the Army and outside of the South. Coffeehouse organizing grew to be a national and even global phenomenon.

As has been noted above, the coffeehouse movement's role in the larger antiwar movement is largely understudied. In *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era*, it will be recalled that David L. Parsons argued that "radical civilians, veterans, and active-duty GI's worked together to organize unprecedented dissent within the U.S. Army during one of the most divisive wars in the nation's history."[98] In his examination of the GI coffeehouses, Parson details the movement by looking strictly at Army bases and highlighting the significance of civilians and GIs joining for their common cause against the war in Vietnam. This chapter enriches that vein of historiography by showing how the movement had a broader influence on the military because it extended outside of the Army into other branches of the military such as the Air Force, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard. Furthermore, through an examination of coffeehouse activism as it occurs in other branches of the military, it also becomes apparent that the coffeehouse movement was not only a southern occurrence or even a movement limited the borders of the United States. This movement was in fact a global phenomenon.

This chapter focuses on the Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse and *Travisty* at Travis Air Force Base; The Liberated Barracks GI Project in Honolulu, Hawaii; Crossman's Tavern and *Amex American Expatriate* in Toronto, Canada; and the Hobbit Coffeehouse and *Semper Fi* in Iwakuni, Japan. All these locations served as meeting places for servicemembers, civilians, and deserters to unite in their opposition of the war in Vietnam.

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[98] David Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 12-13.

Travis Air Force Base, notable due to the 1971 "riot" detailed above, was an air base on the West Coast, located on the edge of the Sacramento Valley in California. It offers an interesting comparison to the GI activism that had proliferated on Army bases in the Carolinas and Kentucky. Its branch and location are the first example illustrating how GI antiwar activism was widespread. Furthermore, the base has more similarities with Army bases in the South in that its underground newspaper *Travisty* spoke to the same issues that newspapers for the other bases addressed such as the infringement of the rights of servicemembers, racism within the military, and issues of women's equality. Known as the "Gateway to the Pacific," Travis Air Force Base was often the last stop for U.S. servicemembers bound for the capital of South Vietnam year-long tours of duty in Southeast Asia. One article stated, "every day, planes loaded with soldiers take off bound for Saigon. Every day wounded soldiers are flown into the second largest military hospital in the United States."[99] This base may have been the closest that the war in Vietnam came to the United States. For this reason, it is not surprising that one of the most active GI coffeehouses in the entire GI movement was right outside of Travis Air Force Base's front gate.

Sipping on a cup of coffee with some buddies at Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse would have been a great way to take a break from a twelve hour shift in a hangar or on the flight line at Travis. A stereo was constantly playing and there was even a rap room in the back.[100] Walking into a coffeehouse during the 1970s was a welcoming and comforting experience. The Liberation Hangar encouraged people together from many different walks of life to mingle, fueling a sense of solidarity and unity that was qualitatively different than the typical loss of self

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[99] Mike in Vacaville, "The Truth About Travis," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.
[100] "Liberation Hangar," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.

that many encountered in the military. The coffeehouse was also a hub for the exchange of information and antiwar activism. More specifically, the coffeehouse offered information on topics and experiences that servicemembers saw as infringements on their rights. For example, coffeehouse activists offered counseling on the Uniform Code of Military Justice and discharges, what types of literature one could possess, what one could display in his or her barracks, and how to obtain a lawyer if necessary.[101] (It is noteworthy that in the aftermath of the 1971 "riot," the newspaper *Travisty* provided ads on legal aid to those involved.)[102]

"Liberation Hangar" directly speaks to the liberation of the working-class members of the Air Force. The name of the coffeehouse "Liberation Hangar" is a piece of evidence in and of itself. "Liberation" signifies setting someone free, perhaps from imprisonment, slavery, or another form of oppression. In this case, the coffeehouse activists sought to set the enlisted-class of the military free from what they saw as the slavery-like conditions of their position in the military. A hangar is a large building where mechanics store jets when they are being worked on. "Maintainers," or those of the laboring enlisted-class worked on the jets in the hangars.

Individual rights within the military proved to be the most prominent issue for GIs at Travis Air Force Base and served as a unifying issue. One article exclaims that, "the military is a death machine, and in this, 'The Travisty,' we strive to inject a spark of life, to aid in the liberation of ourselves and all our brothers and sisters the world over!"[103] Hence, the newspaper took on the name *Travisty*, marking a play on the base's name "Travis," and the word "travesty," with its connotations of falsehood, absurdity, and distortion. As further analysis of this quotation, the use of the words "brother" and "sister" signified a growing attempt to posit the

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[101] "Liberation Hangar," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.
[102] "Travisty Trips" *Travisty,* Independent Voices.
[103] "Our Mission!" *Travisty*, Independent Voices.

desirability of unity and solidarity. Pairing those words with "the world over" emphasized the

call for unity grounded in internationalism. Such language captured the revolutionary tenor of

the times and seemed likely to trigger in Pavlovian fashion the anxieties of anticommunists who

viewed such language of internationalism and fictive kinship as dog whistles for subversion.

Servicemembers were quite vocal about registering their grievances at Travis as well as

expressing their desire for class solidarity in letters to the editors of *Travisty*. One anonymous

writer challenged that reports on the Travis Air Force Base riot gave the appearance of a lack of

unity between white and servicemembers and saw the polarization as intentional. It is this

polarization that "is used to separate the people into classes that are defined by the type of work

people do, amount of money someone makes or has, the neighborhood a person lives in, the

amount of taxes you pay, and in the military the amount of rank a troop has." The writer ended

his or her response with the strong assertion that *Travisty* "could serve as a great uniting factor

for the men and women who are victims of a system that is run for the profit of so few at the

expense of so many."[104] It had become clear to the writer that unity was one of the most

important factors in fighting the oppressive nature of the class system within the military.

Gregory A. Lassonde, another writer to the editors of *Travisty,* was also aware of the

vitality of solidarity within the military. He equated military members, specifically the enlisted

members, to workers in his letter. "I learned that the workers are the real heroes of history. In

the military that means the enlisted people. I learned that only when we workers get together and

can relate to each other better, only then can we change our capitalist society into a socialist one.

The power to change society is there. We have to make it happen."[105] It would be the

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[104] "Letters…," *Travisty*, 1971, Independent Voices.
[105] Gregory A. Lassonde, "Letter to Travis," *Travisty*, November 1, 1973, Independent Voices.

transmission of information by the newspaper and by those responding to the newspaper that would be vital to the growing coalition of activists at the air base.

Information spread not only through *Travisty*, but through other means as well. At the coffeehouse one could take a look around the free library which featured college catalogues, GI newspapers, and job pamphlets.[106] As had been true in coffeehouses in the southern U.S. there was also a plethora of information on the issues that *Travisty* often featured including rights within the military, racism, and women's issues. Moreover, these concerns helped members of Liberation Hangar define themselves and develop a sense of community in an atmosphere that tried desperately to break them apart. One unifying point was the focus on the military's alleged abuse of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, (UCMJ), as a breach of rights within the military that the paper addressed. Coffeehouse newspapers often cited instances of GIs receiving Article 15's which was a form of military punishment.[107] Many saw Article 15's as a method of harassment or intimidation. Furthermore, they felt that it was also used discriminatorily against minority groups.[108] To combat the infringement of rights, the Liberation Hangar taught Airmen how to file an Article 138 which was a complaint against their supervisor for not addressing an issue that had been brought to his attention. As they fought for their rights within the military GIs began to practice community-building at the local level. Active servicemembers even held classes on regulations and the UCMJ in their own barracks.[109] Simply making information available and teaching airmen the information that would help them in times of potential legal

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[106] "Liberation Hangar," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.
[107] An Article 15 is a form of punishment given to military personnel without the need for a court martial or court proceedings.
[108] "Article 15 Campaign," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.
[109] "Counseling," *Travisty,* Independent Voices.

jeopardy was significant in terms of documenting growing class solidarity. Members of the GI coffeehouse were beginning to look out for one another.

Racism was another prevalent concern at the meetings at Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse. Many of the articles addressed racism in the military while others addressed racism in society in general, both as a domestic issue in the United States and a global phenomenon. Some GIs went so far as to say that the military used racism as a tool of division to keep the enlisted servicemembers from gaining too much solidarity. Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse and other coffeehouses around the world sought to end this division by maintaining inclusive environments. Jamie Henry, one GI recounts that "When you go into basic training, you are taught that the Vietnamese are not people."[110] The idea was that it was easier to kill the "enemy" if the enemy was not considered a human. This type of training did not sit well with many African Americans because it was the sort of behavior that had been used by whites to demonize them for more than four and a half centuries. It was easier to discriminate against someone if they were racialized as the "other."

Another article in *Travisty* asserted that the war encouraged racist ideals among whites and went so far as to assert that "many white—particularly southern white—officers and lifers [a term for those who joined the military with the intention of making it a career] are out to get black enlisted men who refuse to act like slaves." This quotation illustrated the complications around the formation of an interracial solidarity because African Americans were put into their own separate laboring group. However, the issue became more complex when the source went on to say "discrimination in the military is not reserved for the black and brown GIs alone.

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[110] Jamie Henry, "Winter Soldier Testimony on Military Racism," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.

Among whites, the casualty rate for men from poor areas, such as Appalachia, is twice as high as for whites from any other area."[111] With this revelation, the color-line was, to at least some extent dissolved, revealing a clear class solidarity. This GI admitted the problem is with both race and class.

What made the Liberation Hangar unique is how coffeehouse activists sought to define themselves as a unified force, a force that crossed racial and gender boundaries to ensure the rights of everyone as a collective group. *Travisty* published articles about rights for women in almost every one of their issues. One particularly intriguing article was about women in the Air Force. A small number of WAFS, or women from the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, who bore illegitimate children were in danger of losing their housing allowance and forced to live in the barracks with no accommodations made for their children. *Travisty* claimed that "these four women have a right to have these children as members of the military and they have the right to expect the same degree of benefits that would be extended to their male counterparts."[112] Not only did this citation speak to need for equality between men and women, but it also emphasized that women, like men, were also laborers in the military and they deserved rights.

In one letter to the editor of *Travisty,* an anonymous writer proclaimed, "The Liberation Hangar to me is a melting pot of American people in service to their country. Also, a melting pot of revolutions. I have never in my life been in a place that recognizes every revolution. The Chicano, the black, the red, the yellow—it's really beautiful, everyone getting together using the pressure the military puts on as a catalyst to keep the people moving together."[113] The military,

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[111] "Military Injustice: Free Billy Smith," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.
[112] "Male Chauvinism," *Travisty,* Independent Voices.
[113] Dan R., "Letter to the Editor," *Travisty*, Independent Voices.

by default, brought together all different kinds of people from many different backgrounds, with the draft and Truman's 1948 executive order guaranteeing that the armed forces increasingly mirrored the diversity of the nation itself. The training, circumstances, and the reality that individuals were going to be deployed to a war zone helped to foster a sense of solidarity. Instead of unifying around the U.S. nation and its military in uncritical patriotism and nationalism, the infringement on individual rights and vectors of racism, classism, and sexism encouraged would-be activists in the formation of a more radical unification, one critical of the war. They increasingly came to see themselves as a coalition of activists, united and attempting to transcend divisions based on race, gender, and class to work against the officer class of the military.

Like other coffeehouses of its era, the Liberation Hangar did not last long. The coffeehouse closed in the fall of 1973 for several reasons. One reason was that there were not enough people working on the paper because GIs could be discharged if their name appeared in the paper or if they were associated with the coffeehouse. Also, because most troops and air support had been pulled out of Vietnam due the accelerating policy of "Vietnamization" in the early 1970s there was less perceived urgency for an antiwar paper than there had been during the bloodiest years of the conflict in terms of U.S. casualties. (The war of course continued to exact a horrific toll in terms of the number of Vietnamese killed.) The change to an all-volunteer force early in 1973 also diminished the perceived need for coffeehouses and underground newspaper at Travis and elsewhere.[114]

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[114] "Moving Forward," *Travisty,* Independent Voices.

The Liberated Barracks GI Project in Honolulu, Hawaii offers a unique example of stateside activism, one that unified civilians and members of all branches of the military to oppose the war in Vietnam and the issues associated with that involvement, specifically the effect of an extraordinarily large military presence in the Hawaiian Islands. The island state hosted "CINCPAC," or the unified military command of the entire Pacific. In other words, every branch of the military had an installation in Hawaii.[115] Like at Travis Air Force Base, activists in the Hawaiian Islands had a coffeehouse: they called it The Liberated Barracks House. But coffeehouse activists there were not seemingly associated with any one specific branch of the military.[116] Diverse in background and military branch affiliation, what drew activists together was their opposition to the war.

Much like the Liberation Hangar Coffeehouse, the Liberated Barracks GI Project had many methods of engaging in both their local and international community. The coffeehouse offered military counseling, legal assistance, educational and entertainment events. For example, a weekly coffeehouse schedule stated that on Monday, anyone could come and work on the newspaper, on Tuesday classes were offered on the uses of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and military benefits for GIs; on Wednesday they showed a political movie and held a rap session; on Thursday they hosted a guest speaker or held a rap session; on Fridays they showed a movie for fun; on Saturday they had live folk singers; and on Sunday they held a meeting to plan the next week's events.[117] These community events would have done much to encourage civilians and servicemembers to gather together, and would have encouraged political activism.

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[115] "Hawaii: Why So Much Military?" *Liberated Barracks*, September 1, 1971, Independent Voices.
[116] The newspapers were not clear about what branch of the military that they were representing. It appears that Liberated Barracks was associated with several branches.
[117] Ad, *Liberated Barracks*, January 1, 1972, Independent Voices.

One striking element about political activism in Hawaii was movement participant's

dedication to worker's rights. In one article titled "¡Viva La Huelga!" an anonymous writer

discusses contemporary labor issues. He or she boldly states that "being a farmworker without a

union is like being an E-1 all your life" a reference to the lowest rank in the military. The writer

went on to argue:

> The Farmworkers' struggle for economic and political equality is the same as the struggle
> that we face as GI's. While the Farmworkers face the exploitive growers—we face the
> brass. While the Farmworkers do the hard work and the growers make the profit—we go
> into the front lines or are called in as strike-breakers to protect the interests of big
> business. While Farmworkers face intimidation, humiliation, and racism in the fields—
> we face it in the military.[118]

By equating their plight as enlisted military members to the plight of farmworkers, this voice

defined his or herself as a worker. What is also important to note is that activists were

specifically identifying themselves with farmworkers. Influenced by the farmworker organizing

in the American Southwest, the author made explicit comparisons to and admired the Filipino

grape pickers and the followers of Cesar Chavez for striking and boycotting for five years and

finally establishing the United Farm Workers Union, hence the reference to the UFW and

Chicano farmworker slogan "¡Viva la Huelga! ("Long live the strike!")[119] This description

furthermore emphasized the presence of a working-class unity because a servicemember was

identifying connections to other workers from different occupations.

Members of the Liberated Barracks GI Project not only contributed to the GI newspaper,

they also expanded their community sphere by encouraging organizers to frequent the Red Flag

Book Store and the Gathering Place. The bookstore specialized in Chinese literature, art work,

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[118] "İViva La Huelga!" *Liberated Barracks,* 1974, Independent Voices.
[119] "İViva La Huelga!" *Liberated Barracks,* 1974, Independent Voices.

and political writings while the Gathering Place made available underground newspapers, comics, and cartoons for people to enjoy.[120] So not only were these activists building a community within the walls of their coffeehouse, they also expanded that community to other locations on the island.

Furthermore, activists in Hawaii built a coalition with the local Hawaiian population. They saw it as their duty to not only fight for their own rights within the military, but to also fight for the rights of the local community. This sense of responsibility came from the realization of a shared exploitive treatment that both groups received from the military. "GIs, like local people, have been denied the freedom to choose the way of life and future that they want." For GI activists, this freedom was taken away by the draft and for Hawaiians this freedom was infringed upon due to what many perceived to be military occupation rooted in U.S. annexation of the Hawaiian Islands under dubious and contested legal circumstances. The Liberated Barracks GI Project called for the GI movement to "join, where possible, struggle and local people who are fighting to change Hawaii… we will create unity with the people of Hawaii."[121] Stronger evidence of GI solidarity with the local populations and the development of international solidarity is evident in the newspaper support of two Hawaiian servicemembers. Travis Air Force Base's Liberation Hangar and Honolulu's Liberated Barracks GI Project both illuminated the power in collective force from a U.S. perspective. Both organizations, like so many of the other coffeehouses, sought to build a coalition between the military and the local community. As noted above, they fostered an atmosphere that welcomed servicemembers and civilians alike by hosting events such as movies, poetry readings, and talks.

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[120] Ad, *Liberated Barracks*, January 1, 1972, Independent Voices.
[121] "GI Movement's Responsibility to the People of Hawaii," *Liberated Barracks,* January 1, 1972.

Private First Class Pete Kealoha and Private Danny Gance, both Hawaiian-decedents,

enlisted in the armed forces with promises of getting good jobs that would become careers. This

ended up not being the case, however. The U.S. government promised Kealoha training in

welding and electronics, and instead the military assigned him to combat engineering. He also

recalled watching his surrounding white servicemembers being promoted to higher ranking

positions with higher pay while he remained stuck at his same rank and work assignment.

Danny Gance's experience was similar. The military assigned him to cutting grass, scrubbing

parking lots, or shoveling snow. Like Pete, he also said that many of his white counterparts were

promoted while he remained among the lowest paid. "There seemed to be an unwritten policy to

promote all haole GIs (white GIs) first and then if there were any promotions left over, to

promote 'some minority group people.'" Additionally, the officer class "represented the military

in Hawaii and its failure to understand or even respect local people and their culture. They

represent the mentality that local people are of a 'lower class' or are 'inferior' to white

people."[122] In this case, "whiteness" allowed for the promotion of white servicemembers above

the promotion of Hawaiian servicemembers, resulting in cracks in working-class solidarity.

Overseas coffeehouse activism shared many of the same characteristics as domestic

coffeehouse activism. While not exactly a coffeehouse, Crossman's Tavern in Toronto Canada

represented GI activism, specifically by draft dodgers, abroad and demonstrates the power of

local and international community building. Functioning in a similar manner and with similar

issues as the coffeehouses in the states, people frequenting Crossman's Tavern sought to meet

and exchange information. Those working at the Tavern also produced the *Amex American*

Expatriate. The tavern and its newspaper were modes of communication among American draft-

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[122] "Army Railroads Two Local GIs," *Liberated Barracks*, 1974.

dodgers and deserters in Canada that provided information about Canada to people in the U.S.[123] A primary goal of the newspaper and tavern was to provide a sense of community to American draft dodgers as well as to provide information about Canada to people in the U.S. who may have been in the process of deserting and escaping to Canada, or considering such a course of action.

Nationalism again emerges as a common denominator in studying activism in Canada. By describing themselves in the way that they did, activists at this coffeehouse location redefined for themselves what it meant to be an American, thus reclaiming nationalism. Interestingly, the group first identified themselves as "American Deserters' Committee," but subsequently changed their name to the "American Expatriates."[124] Specifically the shift in self-identification suggests movement activists evolving from seeing themselves negatively as "deserters" to a more positive status that does not emphasize lawbreaking or one that does not really care for the law. Rather than appearing as a group of people who abandoned their country and maybe even their draft duty, they chose to define themselves as legal settlers of Canada. Electing to still call themselves Americans demonstrates that they were still proud of being Americans, and that they believed that they were still Americans even though they had left their country to avoid the draft and the war in Vietnam. This is evidence of a conscious decision to construct their own identity and their own sense of nationalism.

Furthering the idea of activist identity construction, it is important to note that the activists in Canada did not see themselves as part of the GI antiwar movement. For example, they talk referred to the movement as if they were somehow outside of it. For example, the

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[123] "Anyone can have a Magazine," *Amex Expatriate in Canada,* May 1, 1969, Independent Voices.
[124] "Success Opens New Doors for the New ADC in T.O.," *Amex American Expatriate in Canada*, January 1, 1970, Independent Voices.

underground newspaper dedicated an article to the "GI Press" in which they informed their readers about all of the progress that the GI network was making as well and some of the network's shortfalls, all the while not including themselves as part of that network.[125] Perhaps this is because unlike most of the servicemembers involved in the coffeehouse movement in the states, the activists in Canada were military deserters. Despite their insistence on not being seen formally as a part of the larger umbrella of the coffeehouse movement, they functioned in remarkably similar ways. Serving the same function as a coffeehouse, Crossman's Tavern operated as a centralized meeting location for activists to talk as well as to write about grievances with the military and to counsel servicemen in their newspaper.

One article in particular offered advice on how deserters could avoid being caught on their way to Canada.[126] One key difference between the Canadian-based American activists and the stateside coffeehouses is that they sought to meet the needs of American military deserters rather than the needs of active servicemen and women. These distinctions aside, they did see the significance of the coffeehouse movement, a sense of common identity revealed in this quotation: "Rebel GI newspapers and newsletters are part of the overall rebellion—an important part."[127] It seems that the American Expatriates envisioned themselves as part of this larger antiwar movement as well.

As part of this larger rebellion, the newspapers from Crossman's Tavern referred to two organizations: The Group of Young American Women and the Union of America Exiles. Both groups focused on community building. The Group of Young American Women was a group

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[125] Dave Smith, "GI's Press Speaks Out," *Amex Expatriate in Canada*, June 1, 1970, Independent Voices.
[126] "How they Catch Deserters: How to Not Get Caught," *Amex American Expatriate in Canada*, August-September 1970, Independent Voices.
[127] "Resistance in the Military," *American Expatriate in Canada,* June 1, 1969, Independent Voices.

focused on helping deserters adjust to life in Canada. Primarily, they catered to the physical needs of newly-arrived deserters by providing clothes and household items, but they also explained information on medical services as well as sponsored group activities in their homes.[128] While emphasizing the importance of their activities, it is also necessary as was the case in Chapter 1 above to define these women's activities as work. Essentially, they used their own skills as caretakers and hostesses to contribute to the antiwar effort. These activities were vital to helping American military deserters find a sense of community in Canada. Likewise, The Union of American Exiles participated in similar activism. While the primary focus of their organization was to provide counseling for new arrivals to Canada, they also helped new people learn about the city of Toronto. Most important to their role as community builders, members of The Union of American Exiles sought to "provide warm, human contact for new people." By creating the opportunity for people seeking counselling to relax in private homes they also gave the new arrivals a sense of safety.[129] To an American military deserter on the run for freedom, activists such as those in The Group of Young American Women and The Union of American Exiles played a significant role in helping runaway would-be draftees to finally feeling "at home" again. These were people who willing to help deserters in a new city and country by opening their homes and meeting up with them at Crossman's Tavern. Their homes and the tavern came to play the role of safe havens to many ex-servicemen on the way to their final destinations in Canada, whether in Toronto or beyond.

Where activists in Hawaii found themselves closer than any other American geography to Southeast Asia, currents of war dissent also rippled eastward across the Atlantic Ocean. The

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[128] "Exiled Women are Organized" *American Expatriate in Canada*, April-May 1970, Independent Voices, 30.
[129] "Report on Toronto," *Amex American Expatriate in Canada*, October 1969, Independent Voices, 24.

First Amendment Coffeehouse outside of Frankfurt Army Base in Germany is further evidence of the international scope of the coffeehouse movement. Activists at The First Amendment Coffeehouse defined themselves as a group in their newspaper. They dedicated an entire article to describing who they were.

Named after the amendment that guarantees citizens the freedom of speech and the press, The First Amendment Coffeehouse emphasized the right to write and distribute their newspapers. Like the GI coffeehouse activists in Toronto, Canada, activists at The First Amendment Coffeehouse covered themselves in patriotic language, thus redefining their sense of American nationalism. These servicemembers reclaimed their freedoms of speech and the press and in turn redefined for themselves what it meant to be part of the American nation. The coffeehouse itself fostered a local sense of community and *We Got the Brass* created an international sense of solidarity. Being in contact with other activists from different bases was a significant element of community-building and pushing the coffeehouse movement forward. Additionally, "When things go down at your base, it's important to let us know so we can spread the word. There's courage to be gained in knowing you're not alone." Without the spread of information and the networking between coffeehouses across the nation and across the world, the movement would not have been as prominent as it was.

Surprisingly, they first defined themselves by acknowledging what divided them. One servicemember writes "the fear of the stockade, the isolation, the feeling that it's impossible to act against a monster the size of the U.S. army when you're alone." These fears divided the servicemembers. The fear of being imprisoned for organizing against the army, or even carrying an underground newspaper, deterred many people from taking part in the coffeehouse movement. Divided, individuals could do nothing to make changes in the system that they were

trapped in. Further pushing this idea of division was the fact that these servicemembers resided in Germany. Being stationed outside of the U.S. isolated many servicemembers as they faced separation from friends, family, and a familiar culture. Being deployed in a foreign environment could be a deterrent to building a community.[130] These individuals lacked a sense of community due to being relocated to a new place and not being acquainted with the people around them. It was also incredibly difficult for them to stay connected to the larger coffeehouse movement that was going on in the states. One GI noted, "while GI's in the States are getting together, organizing and fighting back, guys over here are kept in line." Often threatened with the stockade if they demonstrated any forms of resistance, GIs felt increasingly isolated in Germany. Another servicemember went so far as to say that the isolation in Germany "[kept] people feeling alone and helpless." Ironically, however, it was this very sense of isolation, atomization, and division that drove the coffeehouse movement in Germany. *We Got the Brass* wrote that their goals as a coffeehouse and as a newspaper were to "break down this isolation." Therefore, the coffeehouse and the paper itself served as information networks that forged community bonds on local as well as international levels.[131] Military officials' efforts to repress GI coffeehouse activism in Germany certainly disrupted the formation of solidarity, but it shaped the contours of the German movement as well, fostering a solidarity of the oppressed. On the one hand, military officials could threaten activists with pay cuts, prison time, and shutting down their coffeehouse. On the other, it motivated servicemembers to oppose the military officials' effort to divide and discipline them, as evident in the formation of a coffeehouse and underground newspapers.

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[130] "About Us," *We Got the Brass (German Ed.),* Fall 1969, Independent Voices.
[131] "About Us," *We Got the Brass (German Ed.),* Fall 1969, Independent Voices.

The fact that they dedicated an entire news article to explaining who they were illustrates conscious effort to define themselves as antiwar men and women who associated with the Army. The men involved in the Germany movement were already in the Army or were about to be inducted and the women who joined the movement did so from talking with GI's in Germany.[132] However, their self-definition is more complicated. They saw their primary role as breaking down the isolation in the military through hosting activities at the coffeehouse for GIs to attend. Very careful to oppose stereotypes that others placed on them, they renounce the titles of "pot-smoking hippies" and "creepin' commies" by ensuring their readers that they were simply about helping GIs in any way that they could, a less specific and less revolutionary (or subversive, depending on one's vantage point) posture than many of their allies in North America.

A final overseas hub for GI activism was the Hobbit Coffeehouse near the Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan. Amusingly, these activists opted for their coffeehouse's namesake the hobbit characters from J. R. R. Tolkien's beloved novels featuring Bilbo and Frodo Baggins. According to Tolkien, hobbits are unadventurous, fond of socializing, and can defend their homes courageously if the need arises.[133] A group made up of conscripted servicemembers who did not necessarily want to be in Japan would certainly feel "unadventurous," and the whole point of their coffeehouse was to provide a space for socialization. It is little wonder that they derived their inspiration from Tolkien when naming their coffeehouse.

Just as U.S. servicemembers had felt isolated in Germany, troops also felt cut off from the familiar comforts of home in Japan. To combat this isolation, GIs became involved in their new community by frequenting the local GI coffeehouse. Like many other GI coffeehouses, the

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[132] "About Us," *We Got the Brass (German Ed.),* Fall 1969, Independent Voices.
[133] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 2.

Hobbit Coffeehouse became a gathering place for war dissenting servicemen members, as well as for Japanese civilians from the Iwakuni area. This is an example of international solidarity in action. Its main goals were to be a place for people to relax together, get legal assistance, and to talk about grievances they had against their superior officers. As their newspaper, *Semper Fi*, named for the USMC motto revealed, the Hobbit Coffeehouse had celebrated its opening by bringing people together for curry rice, spaghetti, and BLT's. It advertised itself as a place to meet Japanese friends, enjoy movies, cheap food, and it featured a library, an important amenity given the paucity of English language print culture in Japan at the time. It quickly became a local community center.[134] While Iwakuni had a history of racial problems, Kenneth Allison, a black marine from Chicago argued that "the Hobbit was one of the few establishments in Iwakuni that does not practice racial discrimination and the only place where black and white marines can relax and mix casually."[135] His testimony offers evidence of a growing class solidarity based on an *international and interracial* foundation.

On a global level, the coffeehouse made strides to connect with the Japanese community, much like the Liberated Barracks GI Project did in Hawaii. They taught Japanese phrases in their newspaper and frequently communicated with the Japanese press to keep them informed about what was happening on the Marine base.[136] On April 4 and 12, 1970, GIs and Japanese citizens gathered at Kintai Bridge to sing songs, listen to music, talk and just have a good time during the Cherry Blossom Festival.[137] The peace meeting got broad media coverage in Japan and was notable because USMC officers showed up to shut the event down. As a result, three men – Bob Dorton, Dennis Hahn and Lonnie Renner – were charged with "Involvement in

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[134] "That Hobbit Story," *Semper Fi,* October 30, 1973, Independent Voices.
[135] "Hobbit Off Limits," *About Face!*, August-September 1972, Independent Voices.
[136] "Semper Fi Press Service," *Semper Fi*, March 1, 1970, Independent Voices
[137] "Peace Gathering Bugs Brass," *Semper Fi*, May 22, 1970, Independent Voices.

Dissident and Protest Activities," but the *Semper Fi* insisted that nothing illegal had been going on.[138] This demonstration highlighted the fact that the coffeehouse activists of Iwakuni had widespread support among the rank and file on base and strong backing by the Japanese civilian antiwar organizations. There was obviously some sense of solidarity between the coffeehouse activists and the Japanese civilians.

Admittedly, not all patrons of the coffeehouse in Iwakuni and readers of its newspaper were as accepting of some of the coffeehouse's activities. An unhappy reader of *Semper Fi*, wrote to the GI coffeehouse activists and offered the perspectives of a former "insider" who now saw himself as an "outsider" observing the coffeehouse movement. Signing his letter JAS, he indicated that he had once been part of the staff of *Semper Fi*, based out of Iwakuni, Japan and had been asked to be an editor of the paper. He declined because he did not feel that his political views directly aligned with other members of the movement. In his letter, he discussed his perceptions of what the coffeehouse and the paper are doing wrong, as well as some of the things that they were doing right. The first thing that he denounced was the language of violence that the paper allegedly used. He pointed out that this sort of language exists on the right and left of the political spectrum, but in order the movement to be of success activists needed to refrain from such extremes. Like those involved in the GI coffeehouse movement, JAS objected to American involvement in Asia and the integral racism of American society. From an analysis it is apparent that JAS agreed with coffeehouse activists publishing *Semper Fi* on some of their ideas, but he did not agree with how they were going about achieving their goals or the language

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[138] "Peace Gathering Bugs Brass," *Semper Fi*, May 22, 1970, Independent Voices.

they used to articulate their grievances. Rather, he insisted that they should be writing letters to their congressmen instead of dedicating all their time and energy to *Semper Fi.*[139]

Semper Fi featured an insider perspective in responding to the critique of JAS. Members of the GI coffeehouse movement at Iwakuni felt like writing to congressmen would do no good. Furthermore, they argued that *Semper Fi* was not just an anti-military paper: "it is a movement paper directed towards a better world in which to live…. These problems will end only when the monster has been destroyed." To say that the only way the problems in their society will be resolved is to destroy the "monster" that is the military could certainly be seen radical language. This is strikingly further than the coffeehouses in the South were willing to go in terms of the intensity of the construction of a language of dissent. *Semper Fi*'s concluded their response to JAS's letter by stating that his sort of thinking was more detrimental to the cause than helpful.[140]

Eventually, like many of the other coffeehouses and of GI meeting spots, the military declared The Hobbit Coffeeshop off-limits. "The Hobbit is just one example of the type of military maneuvering that is happening on bases everywhere."[141] When GIs united the higher-ups typically responded by trying to break up the community. A press statement made by a marine at Iwakuni said, "We believe that the Hobbit was placed off limits because the GI movement is growing in strength and unity. The brass [are] afraid of us." [142] This quotation seems to demonstrate the idea of "us versus them"—the officer class against the enlisted class. Lawyer, U.S. Representative, and women's rights activist, Bella Azug offered a different insight about the coffeehouse in claiming in the pages of *Semper Fi* that the coffeehouse was a great

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[139] JAS, "Letter to the editor," *Semper Fi*, September 20, 1971, Independent Voices.
[140] Vince, "A Response to JAS" *Semper Fi*, September 20, 1971, Independent Voices.
[141] "GIs Fight Back," *Winter Soldier*, June 1, 1973, Independent Voices.
[142] "Hobbit Off Limits," *Abut Face!*, August-September 1972, Independent Voices.

"alternative to the gathering of servicemen in the streets and bars of Iwakuni, where prostitution is rampant. [It is] a meeting place that discourages racism and the abuse of women."[143] To her and other activists, the Hobbit would give people of color and women a safe atmosphere in which to socialize, while simultaneously keeping servicemembers out of trouble and decreasing levels of prostitution.

Even when the military declared the Hobbit off-limits to servicemembers, that action was not strong enough to stop the already empowered group of activists. Rather than go inside the coffeehouse to organize their newspaper, they simply sat outside of the building putting together copies of *Semper Fi*. As they saw it, the officers "may trip and place the meeting place of the movement off limits, but they can't place the movement off limits."[144] The GIs had built a movement that could at least in the short run withstand the military's efforts to keep them from going into the Hobbit. Unfortunately, however, the Hobbit did not reopen after it was declared off-limits by military officials.

Coffeehouse movement activists, whether they were enlisted servicemembers, draft dodgers, civilians, African Americans, whites, men, women, Americans or Japanese, all came together in a common cause as they sought to resist the U.S. military and American involvement in the Vietnam War. During its heyday, the GI coffeehouse movement grew beyond its strength at Army installations and expanded dramatically beyond the borders of the American South. The GI movement's influence reached from the East Coast to the West Coast, from Hawaii to Japan, and as far away as Canada and Germany. Activists defined themselves in a variety of ways,

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[143] "Congresswoman Bella Abzug Supports Marines at Iwakuni," *Semper Fi*, June 14, 1972, Independent Voices.
[144] "More MP Harassment," *Semper Fi*, July 25, 1972, Independent Voices.

some of them overlapping sites of identity: as part of the GI coffeehouse movement, part of the

broader GI movement, or as part of the sprawling antiwar movement in the broader American

and international populace. What is certain about their organizing is that GI coffeehouses and

other meeting places such as taverns and bookstores strengthened the local antiwar communities

in which they were located. Likewise, the newspapers that these establishments produced

strengthened the coffeehouses' connections with other antiwar establishments, locally and

abroad. The fact that these establishments spread on a global scale speaks to the greater

significance that they had. Not only did they strengthen local bonds between servicemembers

and civilians, blacks and whites, men and women, but they also created bonds across the globe.

Because of this coalition building, enlisted servicemembers crossed many social divisions and at

their most successful moments created a thriving solidarity that was multiracial, multinational,

and feminist in nature within the military and in contexts like communities of draft-dodgers (or

expatriates) in Toronto. Even if that solidarity ultimately proved tenuous when activists faced

concerted opposition from powerful forces in and beyond the military, its creation spoke to the

tremendous potential of organizing across traditional likes of class-, race-, and gender-based

divisions and established an important precedent for future attempts to organize and foster

solidarity whether in the military or in the broader American society.

Conclusion

Standing in the parking lot outside of the front gates of Travis Air Force Base, I tried to picture what the string of now-dilapidated business establishments would have looked like fifty years ago. Today, there is a hole-in-the wall restaurant called Pink's that sells Hawaiian food and a taco shop a little further down. The storefront that no longer exists, is on the corner, its windows covered with newspapers. Fifty years ago, this was the site of a GI coffee shop called Liberation Hangar. Based on descriptions that I had read from various underground newspapers, I could imagine that once upon a time this would have been a lively hangout spot. Antiwar materials and psychedelic posters may have hung on the walls, a busy backdrop for GIs who have been sitting around drinking coffee and talking about the latest flight that left for Vietnam. Perhaps music would have escaped the doors, or maybe someone would have been reciting poetry. From the outside looking in, there is not much to see now, but back then, Liberation Hangar was a center for activity and a site of controversy. This antiwar coffee shop located just steps outside of the air base's front gate would have been a source of contention during the Vietnam War era. Whether you found yourself sitting inside or could never imagine entering the coffeehouse would likely determine how you viewed the movement activists within and even the war itself.

Just as there were profound divisions between insiders and outsiders of the broader antiwar movement, there were also notable divisions within the coffeehouse movement itself. One of the most readily discernible differences between individual coffeehouses had a great deal to do with geography. While social issues were the primary motivation for the coffeehouse movement in the South, a broader-based form of radicalism defined the movement on the West Coast and abroad. Writing in the *New York Times,* reporter Douglas Kneeland, highlighted

geographic divide when he noted that most movement organizers just wanted to see the war end in Southeast Asia and for servicemembers to have constitutional rights in the army but contrasts those ideas to the more radical West Coast coffeehouses. He went on to contrast those more widely-embraced ideas with what he perceived to be more radical West Coast coffeehouses, writing "the West Coast is to the GI movement what the Panthers are to the black movement."[145] He goes so far to say that "Some of the guys are more revolutionary, they would like to turn the guns around. But I don't think any of the organizers take that very seriously." This regional division of ideology goes to show that even within the coffeehouse movement, there were differing ideas about how the movement should be organized and how ambitiously it should define it transformational aims for the broader society.

These differing perceptions between the members of the GI coffeehouse movement and the near-constant hostility and harassment from those outside of the movement looking in led to the overall weakening of the movement. The military transferred, court-martialed, and discharged GI organizers, while local authorities targeted civilian organizers and sought to shut down GI coffeehouses.[146] Further weakening the movement, was distance and division between individual coffeehouses scattered throughout the United States and even around the world. Given the constant of external opposition and challenges of "turnover" due to the nature of the military draft and steady deployments maintaining and expanding the movement and its reach and influence was a formidable challenge. Coffeehouse-published newspapers could help facilitate communication and foster a sense of participation in a broader-based social movement through the creation of a shared print culture, but despite having a solid medium of

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[145] Douglas E Kneeland, "War Stirs More Dissent among G.I.'s: Indochina War is Stirring Dissension on a Widening Scale within the Ranks of the Army," *New York Times*, June 21, 1970.
[146] Douglas E. Kneeland, "War Stirs More Dissent among G. I.'s: Indochina War is Stirring Dissension on a Widening Scale within the Ranks of the Army," *New York Times*, June 21, 1970.

communication through their underground newspapers which they sent globally, the distance between them and the wide variety of issues that they chose to address proved to be challenging to the solidarity of their movement.

Because of the inability of movement insiders and outsiders to see the coffeehouse movement from the other's perception, and because of ideological divides between coffeehouse activists in different regions in the U.S. and abroad, the lifespan of the movement was ultimately short-lived. Movement outsiders greatly inhibited the progress of the GI coffeehouse movement, and the coffeehouses never develop a solidarity strong enough to extend past the walls of their establishments and into the military institution in truly formative ways. Because of the external pressures, many of the coffeehouses could not remain open for long.

The GI coffeehouse movement from 1968 through 1972 was a significant addition to the antiwar movement and to the New Left during the Vietnam era. Rarely talked about, this group of activists, civilians and servicemembers, blacks, whites, Hispanics, as well as locals from Germany and Japan united to form coffeehouses and underground newspapers. They united for many reasons including their opposition to racism, their support for broader rights within the military and specific women's rights. And the cognitive glue that held the movement together as much as anything else was the core issue of class within the military and the powerful potential for class-based identity and solidarity. The coffeehouse experience melded with the experience of military service in this era to nurture the multiple identities, that managed for a time, to work together against a common foe by building community. The fact that they organized around so many diverse issues and mobilized in so many far-flung locations proved to be a stumbling block for GI coffeehouse activists. The issues they sought to address were so diverse – and so entrenched – that the movement suffered from a lack of sustained focus. As the GI coffeehouse

underground newspapers, mainstream press, and the congressional hearings demonstrated, oppositional forces such as local police, officers in the military, and ordinary citizens interfered with and to some extent quelled the movement. As a result, many GI coffeehouses did not remain open for long and their underground newspapers were short-lived. Despite the limitations to their movement for an improved society, GI coffeehouse organizers at their most successful were able to foster among at least some servicemembers a sense of solidarity within the military. Many of the issues that GI coffeehouse organizers faced were common between servicemembers of the enlisted class, resulting in a solidarity closely linked to their commonality of being mostly working-class citizens.

Thus, for brief moments during the movement, GI coffeehouse organizers assisted by the newspapers they published, became involved in class-based politics with a nod toward the development of a working-class consciousness, no small feat in and of itself. This solidarity crossed branches of the military and took shape as a national and occasionally even an international movement. In the process of organizing for social and political issues, GI coffeehouse activists created their own definition of nationalism first to critique the American empire and then to redefine it as their own. Ultimately, however, GI coffeehouse activists were unable to sustain this newfound identity founded in unity. The movement's inability to reach beyond the intimate confines of the coffeehouses themselves and the audience who read their newspapers reveals the limits of class-based politics during the Vietnam War era. Except for a few mentions in works about the broader antiwar movement, the contribution of GI coffeehouse activism to the larger antiwar movement has largely been forgotten, but it left an important legacy and illuminates in important ways the challenges of mobilizing – even against an

unpopular war – when the constitutional rights of the social movement participants themselves

are abridged due to their military status.

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