Book Reviews


What makes an institution successful as a site of diversity and inclusion? The US military is often touted for its exemplary status as a diverse institution. Indeed, much rides on that status: “if diversity cannot work in the armed forces, it may not work anywhere in society” (p. 193). If that is true, then we ought to make clear what conditions characterize successful institutions. Rohall, Ender, and Matthews’s edited volume does not provide enough evidence for a verdict, but it does skillfully draw the question into focus. The goal of the book is to “provide insights that will make the armed services capitalize on diversity and inclusion to create a more cohesive, professional military” (p. 12). Diversity is understood throughout the volume primarily as the myriad “variations in social statuses in society,” which includes both quantitative and normative dimensions (p. 1). As a text with practical goals, it presents significant and up-to-date research in a manner accessible to “military leaders, service members, and students of the military” (p. 12). In its scope and accessibility, this volume is a valuable contribution both to researchers interested in questions of diversity and to service members who are responsible for understanding and promoting diversity and inclusion within their organizations.

The book is divided into three parts. Framed around racial and ethnic diversity, Part I includes chapters on African-American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American groups. Part II provides timely chapters on gender, sexuality, and religious diversity in the ranks. In the final section, Rohall, Ender, and Matthews weave the threads together in an insightful discussion about the future direction and possibilities of diversity and inclusion through the lens of intersectionality. Though every chapter deserves attention, I wish to draw attention to a few provocative themes.

Should we consider diversity and inclusion successful when prejudices hold fast and certain groups are endangered? Deenesh Sohoni (chapter 4) uses a legal-historical methodology to show that the relationship between military service and citizenship has always been
mitigated by ideas of race. In his view, “the history of Asian-American military service demonstrates the resilience of racial ideologies for ‘American Citizenship’ despite strong instrumental pressures towards the inclusion of minorities” (p. 73). As a minor theme in his chapter, William Meadows (chapter 5) considers the harm of the “Indian Scout Syndrome”—the tendency to assign Native Americans to particularly dangerous assignments because of the stereotype that they possess innate warfighting abilities (p. 89). This stereotype thrives on the revered status of “warriors” in some Native American cultures. Aware of the stereotype, Meadows suggests that the martial ethos found in Native American cultures might provide a framework for the “reinvigoration of ethos in the modern military” (p. 104). We should ask, though, when diversity is less about social justice than it is the needs of the military, how thin is the edge separating inclusion from exploitation?

As the military becomes more inclusive, service members and researchers need to continuously renegotiate the aims of diversity and the responsibilities that follow. Part II shines because each chapter details the costs of inclusion while offering guidance to military leaders. In their chapter on the inclusion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual service members, David Smith and Karin De Angelis (chapter 7) press the question: what should we expect from diversity? Smith and De Angelis show that objections to inclusion are often rooted in a worry about strong interpersonal relationships (social cohesion), and not the group’s ability to achieve a task (task cohesion). Instead of forcing social homogeneity, task cohesion shifts the focus beyond the group and gives the group purpose. Successful diversity is thus defined by mission accomplishment.

A military succeeds when its people are supported. Rohall, Ender, and Matthews close the volume by reminding readers that the point of studying diversity in the military is, in part, about “maximizing the potential of people in service” (p. 203). Yet, it is evident that military sociology is lacking in research focused on intersectionality. To better the military and its people, the editors argue, future research should proceed in this direction. They also suggest that veteran status should figure into the intersectional matrix and that it could be used as a “master status” in order to further military interests (p. 204). However, from a normative standpoint, the “master status” claim is worrisome because it promotes manipulating a particular identity into a dominant social position.

Overall, this is a timely contribution to the study of diversity and inclusion in the US military. The rich collection of research and scholarly discussions will benefit those interested in the structure and composition of
the US military. For readers who expect more of diversity than mission accomplishment, it remains unclear whether diversity will work in the military. On its own terms, however, Inclusion in the American Military certainly exceeds its objectives.

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This book tracks how Egypt’s military leaders have “hegemonized” the country’s politics and economics for over six decades. Inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, in the author’s words:

It traces the genealogies of military penetration into the urban spaces of all social classes of the population toward their full subjugation. It reveals how officers in recent history deployed neoliberal means both to make business profits and to establish constant surveillance and omnipresent control over docile or rebellious masses. While propagating nationalistic rhetoric about guarding it, the Egyptian army has militarized the nation for long decades in the past and diligently continues to do so in the present (p. 2).

Following a chronology, the author recounts how military officers’ power expanded throughout the 1950s and 1960s, even to the chagrin of the principal officer in mufti, President Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Abul-Magd confirms the role played by Nasser’s best friend-turned-foe, Field Marshal ‘Abd al-Hakim ‘Amer, whose control of the armed forces was a serious impediment to Nasser’s Arab socialist goals. If Nasser’s successor, Anwar Sadat, oversaw some demilitarization during his 1970s liberalization of Egypt’s political economy, this situation was greatly altered after Sadat’s 1981 assassination. Hosni Mubarak allowed the charismatic Field Marshal, ‘Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala, to expand greatly the military’s role in the production of civilian goods during the 1980s. This set the stage for the emergence of a new “Milbus” class of “neoliberal officers” from the early 1990s onward, with the officers themselves exempted from the usual regulations regarding taxation and labor relations. Retired officers now exercise significant control of Egypt’s economy, but they are also, importantly, omnipresent