STUDENTS OR SOLDIERS?: THE QUESTION OF SCHOOL CHOICE AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE OAKLAND MILITARY INSTITUTE

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ABSTRACT

Public military charter schools have introduced a military-model of structure and discipline within the American public school system. Starting in 1980 and fully taking off at the turn of the 21st century, this alternative style of education spread to cities all over the country, with the strongest presence in underserved urban areas. The school choice movement, the de-regulated economy of the Bush Administration, and 9/11 era civil-military relations provided the perfect storm for the U.S. military to permeate the public school system. *Students or Soldiers?: The Question Of School Choice And Educational Equity Through The Lens Of The Oakland Military Institute* investigates the Oakland Military Institute (OMI), established in the fall of 2001, as a case-study for how the military component of public military charter schools affects the education and identities of American youth.

Based on multiple sources of data and methods including: the study of OMI's administrative documents, classroom observation, and formal interviews with faculty, staff, alumni, and families, this thesis examines the influence of the military model on educational choice and equity. This thesis argues that OMI, as a school that enrolls predominantly working class students of color, exposes underserved communities to a military culture and identity that their affluent counterparts can afford to avoid. Within the framework of the charter school debate, this socialization of Oakland youth through the military model complicates the nature of free choice in education and re-imagines the identities of working class students as "disciplined" cadets and soldiers.

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INTRODUCTION

As I entered into the gates of Oakland Military Institute at 3877 Lusk Street, I heard an unfamiliar shouting: “Left! Left! Left, right, left!” I heard marching and whistles, and I turned the corner to see a yard full of kids. Young students from age 11 to 18 all wearing a cadet uniform. Some kids were playing soccer and basketball and others were running around, but my eyes are drawn to two lines of young 6th graders marching. I saw a tall man in a full army combat uniform shouting orders at them and clapping, trying to show them the correct beat of the marching. “No, no!,” he shouted, “In unison!”

For any Bay Area public school, this is not the norm. How did a public military charter school open in Oakland, California? Oakland Military Institute is the only one of its kind in Northern California and it’s the first every state-sponsored public charter school.[1] Then-Mayor Jerry Brown, the founder of OMI, received a hoard of local backlash at the thought of a school that operated under a military framework. His charter was rejected from the Oakland School Board and could only secure approval from the governor of the time.[2] The structure and discipline provided by the military model was Jerry Brown’s solution to the failing public schools of Oakland and the rest of the east bay. For Brown, OMI was about giving Bay Area families more choice in where they send their kids to school. He claimed, “These families and countless others who want an outstanding education for their children have every right to choose among a wide array of educational philosophies, including an academic school operated in collaboration with the [military]."[3] As a school that enrolls predominantly working class students of color, OMI is an option for parents who cannot afford to send their children to private schools and are wary of sending them to public schools. Brown wanted to provide an alternative choice: a school based on a military model that remains tuition-free. OMI is not just an alternative option to the run of the mill public school; the military identity and its location in West Oakland, California make this educational institution a worthy subject of study. The distinct features of a public military charter school—the sources of funding, the military culture, and the student population it attracts—begs a further examination within the framework American culture, power, and identity.

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[1] “History,” Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019, https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527563&type=d&pREC_ID=1042228.

[2] Martha Groves, “Oakland Military Charter School OKd,” *Los Angeles Times,* December 7, 2000, accessed January 30, 2019, http://articles.latimes.com/2000/dec/07/news/mn-62437.

My initial interest in studying this topic emerged out of personal experience with the Oakland Military Institute. As an East Oakland native, I grew up living near the school, yet I never knew much about it. A significant amount of friends, old classmates, and neighbors attended the military school, while I had the privilege of attending a private Catholic high school in Berkeley, California. I had always been curious about the choice many made to send their kids to a public military charter school. Through an American Studies lens, I regarded Oakland Military Institute as a perfect window through which to investigate the convergence of the United States military and the American public education system. In this thesis, I examine the military component of the school and the effects of the military model on students. Furthermore, I explore the nature of educational choice within the context of a public military charter school in Oakland.

Critical scholars have analyzed the economic and political conditions in American society that have made the rise of military charter schools possible. The politics and theory of school choice have also been well-studied and analyzed by education scholars, mapping out new models of public education in recent decades. The rise in school militarization, the mushrooming of public military charter schools over the past century, and the school choice debate has been recorded and expounded to provide a framework for the analysis of military culture and its implications in a charter system. These studies help make sense of the existence of Oakland Military Institute, although they do not fully account for the intersection of school choice and the social implications of military exposure at a public military charter school.

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[3] Jerry Brown, "A Few Good Schools," *Education Next, 1, no. 2* (Summer 2001), accessed January 2, 2019, https://www.educationnext.org/a-few-good-schools/.

The first scholar to focus on the intersections of militarization, corporations, and education, Kenneth J. Saltman, exposed the many ways schooling has become the means through which the expansion of global corporate power is enforced. In his work, *Education as Enforcement: Militarization and Corporatization of Schools*, Saltman argues that school militarization comes in two forms or trends: 'education as enforcement' or 'military education'. 'Education as enforcement' understands militarized public education as a manifestation of the militarizing of civil society, which he explains is part of a broader movement toward neoliberal corporate imperatives as they expand markets through the real and symbolic violence of war.[4]

The second form of school militarization to which Saltman refers is 'military education,' which encompasses "explicit efforts to expand and legitimate military training in public schooling."[5] Such efforts are exhibited through paramilitary youth programs such as the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and the California Cadet Corps (CACC). In their work,

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[4] Kenneth J. Saltman, "Education as Enforcement: The Militarization and Corporatization of Schools," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41554551.

[5] Saltman, "Education as Enforcement," 28.

"Disciplining Social Difference: Some Cultural Politics of Military Training in Public High Schools," Lesley Bartlett and Catherine Lutz chronicled the establishment of the JROTC through the 1916 National Defense Act.[6] The scholars postulate that in its early years as well as in the 1990s, during a period of explosive growth for the program, the JROTC serves to assimilate nonwhite youth and discipline social difference.[7] Bartlett and Lutz introduce a comparative analysis between the original purpose of the JROTC in the 1910s and the later purpose during the 1990s. They contextualize the aims of the paramilitary youth training program within the perceived social ills that plagued each era: in influx of European immigration and racial tension respectively.[8]

While Bartlett and Lutz offer a social and political argument about the purpose of training programs, Brooke Johnson offers an ethnographic study of a public military charter school. Johnson's 2009 case study of Military Educational Institute in Eastmoore, California illustrates the nexus between increased militarism and the importance of neoliberal ideals in U.S. society.[9] Johnson echoes Saltman's warning of a broader educational movement toward neoliberal corporate imperatives that reinforce the ideologies of war. Her dissertation, "From Schoolground to Battleground: A Qualitative Study of a Military-Style Charter School," argues that neoliberal policies and militarized practices are applied to public schools located in underserved communities and working-class neighborhoods to remedy the failing education system: "As these schools are often labeled as failing by school districts and states, militarism and neoliberal policies are presented as a solution to such schools."[10] Neoliberal policies, she argues, reproduce the social injustices of the U.S. educational system by "pushing more and more poor students of color away from higher education and toward the military."[11] She describes militarism and neoliberalism as the "twin forces of U.S. imperialism," which both serve the same purpose of glorifying and prolonging war.[12] This ideological link "makes schools more vulnerable to militarism as educational programs and funding are held as hostages in exchange for access to U.S. youth."[13] According to Johnson, the popularity of neoliberalism and militarism in the 21st century have made equal opportunity in public education a distant American Dream.[14]

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[6] Lesley Bartlett and Catherine Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference: Some Cultural Politics of Military Training in Public High Schools," *Urban Review,* 30, no. 2 (1998): 125, file:///Users/sarahstenger/Downloads/Disciplining_Social_Difference.pdf.

[7] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference,"133.

[8] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 125.

[9] Brooke Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground: A Qualitative Study of a Military-Style Charter School," (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2017), 148, accessed September 13, 2018, http://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/304848807?accountid=11091.

Her dissertation, "From Schoolground to Battleground: A Qualitative Study of a Military-Style Charter School," also frames the militarized educational context within the school's construction of gender and sexuality, revealing the hyper-masculine culture that results from a military model. She argues that "hegemonic military masculinity is exemplified at the Military Educational Institute through the condonement of violence vis-a-vis a warrior hero archetype."[15] This hegemonic masculinity is promoted by the military model and is a powerful force that shapes “social interactions, social patterns, and social identities for both boys and girls” at the public military charter school.[16]

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[10] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 24.

[11] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 68.

[12] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 68.

[13] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 68.

[14] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 29.

[15] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 26.

The discourse of school choice, which is not a topic of Johnson’s work, further complicates the nature of public military charter schools. It is an almost over-studied topic in the educational world as scholars argue for and against charter, voucher, and magnet programs. Most of the discourse on school choice either argues for the introduction of market-based theory into public education or against it on the basis of academic outcomes or implications of racial diversity. Michael Fabricant, Michelle Fine, and Edward P. St. John, however, take the scholarship of school choice to the next level by questioning the very nature of the freedom of school choice through the lens of natural disaster and crisis. Fabricant and Fine argue that the free market policies of the school choice movement allow profit-driven schools and corporations to take advantage crisis.[17] In their book, *Charter Schools and the Corporate Makeover of Public Education*, Fabricant and Fine state:

> We have no doubt and substancial evidence that parents in many communities, largely African American, Latino, and immigrant, are deeply distressed by the absence of quality education. We are equally convinced, however, that the charter movement is now riding on the waves of the deep despair and desires of low-income families seizing the tactical opportunity to privatize the public assets of mature welfare-state systems. Because the decay of public services is particularly acute in the poorest communities of color, they emerge as a critical front line in the war to reengineer or privatize services.[18]

The authors point to instances of natural disaster in New Orleans and of poverty in Chicago as moments of crises where the school choice movement swoops in and exploits communities of color. Chaos in the wake of the New Orlean’s Katrina and the broken education system in

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[16] Johnson, “From School Ground to Battle Ground,” 111.

[17] Michael Fabricant and Michelle Fine, *Charter Schools and the Corporate Makeover of Public Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012), 88-95.

[18] Fabricant and Fine, *Charter Schools and the Corporate Makeover,* 90.

Chicago made these cities ripe for the charter movement to thrive. In his work, "Nola Aftershock: The Consequences of Disaster Capitalism," Edward P. St. John builds upon the work of Fabricant and Fine by taking a deep dive into the effects of disaster capitalism on the New Orleans public schools through the lens of several schools as case studies. St. John shows how the exclusionary admissions practices of some charter schools post- Katrina re-affirmed the existing social inequalities of the city. He writes that, "school reforms favored families in the wealthier areas of the city. It is not evident that the recovery efforts addressed the long-standing inequalities in NOLA schools, indeed, it appears the opposite has occurred."[19]

Fabricant, Fine, and St. John all recount how community crises have brought in capitalist strategies to educational systems, thereby heralding in a restricted and decreased quality of school choice.

In conducting this research, and familiarizing myself with the scholarly discussion of military culture in education, military sponsored schooling, military public charter schools, and school choice, I found a gap. While these studies provide an essential framework to conceptualize the military culture and history of Oakland Military Institute, they do not account for an understanding of educational choice and thus, equity, through the lens of the saturation of military culture, symbols, rhetoric, and structure. The convergence of military exposure in public schools and complication of the free choice that charter schools allegedly bring is an untouched concept that adds nuance to the well-studied subjects of military education and school choice. Furthermore, this work will contribute to the ongoing conversation on public military charter schools by being the first to focus solely on OMI as an educational institution. In this thesis, I argue that an in-depth study of the Oakland Military Institute reveals how underserved communities are disproportionately exposed to military culture, values, and rhetoric which complicates and restricts the freedom of educational choice among bay area families who seek alternatives to public schooling yet lack financial means for private institutions.

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[19] Edward P. St. John, "Nola Aftershock: The Consequences of Disaster Capitalism," in *Only in New Orleans: School Choice and Equity Post-Hurricane Katrina*, ed. Luis Mirón,Brian R. Beabout, Joseph L. Boselovic (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2015), 231.

After choosing to focus on OMI as a case study for my thesis, I applied for a research grant to visit OMI to gain more insight on how the military presence manifested itself in daily life at the school. I wanted to understand how military culture was practiced and enforced to gain a deeper perspective on the role of the army at OMI. I was very lucky to receive an American Studies Research Grant which allowed me to spend two full days at OMI on November 26 and 27 of 2018.

At OMI, I was led on an extensive tour, sat in on a classroom, observed formations, and conducted over 9 interviews with alumni, staff, teachers, the commandant, and the superintendent. Regarding how this research trip fit into my overall plan, these new sources of information became the most crucial part of thesis research. After observation of the school, I decided to look more closely at the militarization of students during their time at OMI rather than solely at recruiting materials. I felt that understanding the military's role at OMI through the daily lives of students would better equip me to answer my research question—how does the military aspect of OMI affect the education and identities of students?

Before visiting OMI, I made plenty of assumptions; some of which turned out to be true and others turned out to be grossly misguided. I assumed that OMI staff, faculty, and especially the military officials emphasized enlistment in the army (in some capacity) as a career choice. I expected the majority of OMI graduates to enlist. This assumption was not at all correct. While several students from each class do apply to a military academy or enlist in the army after their senior year, many do not.[20] The students at OMI are exposed to recruitment in ways that regular public school children are not, but it was made abundantly clear to me that students are not pressured or pushed toward military by staff. If anything, the enlistment in the military is put on a level playing field along with college, trade school, and employment as a viable post-graduation option. Another assumption I made was that discipline at OMI was focused solely on the demerit system, as the website suggested. This assumption was also wrong. I learned during my visit to OMI that in recent years with the new superintendent, the disciplinary focus has shifted. A new Restorative Justice program along with trauma-informed training have become a crucial part of the disciplinary system at OMI. While these new changes are proving to be successful, there still exists pushback from OMI's military staff, highlighting a key difference in approaches to discipline between civilian and military staff.

One of the most important aspects of my visit to OMI was learning about the militarization of the cadets. I had assumed that all students were pushed to enlist in the military after graduation and while this was an inaccurate assumption, the militarizing of identities was an observation that was extremely clear to me during my time at OMI and through the interviews I conducted. I learned about the summer boot camp, uniform guidelines, the military ranking system, the military achievements, and the everyday practice of military courtesy at OMI and was able to gain a deeper understanding of how students form their identities around the military during their time at OMI. Ideas of self-discipline, leadership, and interactions with authority are all formed through the lens of the military tradition at OMI. This was not a surprise to me, but it was another layer that I did not think I would focus on. During my trip to OMI, I found that my claim shifted from "students are pushed to enlist when they leave OMI" to "students are militarized during their time at OMI." This discovery was crucial during my research and it continues to form my understanding of OMI as a living archive.

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[20] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

Through studying OMI's website, recruiting brochures, tours, class observation, and interviews, I began to see why students are drawn to the military charter school. I found that the structure provided by OMI as well as the many programs it offers draws low-income students to enroll. The military component is a factor that implies discipline and structure but at a price. I found that the militarization of students' identities and the exposure to post-graduate military options is not a recruiting tool but a cost that poor students of color must endure in order to receive benefits that bay area public schools do not offer.

In the following thesis, I explore how OMI came to be and how it functions in Oakland, California. I begin with Chapter I: The Roots of OMI where I examine the history of military in educational institutions, most notably through youth paramilitary training programs. OMI, as a public military charter school, is under the California Cadet Corps and the JROTC.[21] I explore the rise and fall (and then rise again) of these programs in America through the lens of events like World War I and the Anti-War movement of the 1960s and 70s. I then provide a contextual analysis of the public military charter school "trend" which led to the opening of such a school in the Bay Area. In this section, I question the convergence of this military school trend and the heightened status of the military and war in the 9/11 era. I end Chapter I by giving the history of the establishment of OMI through the lens of Jerry Brown's involvement and the federal, state, and private funds that made it possible.

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[21] "History," Oakland Military Institute, accessed October 30, 2018, https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527563&type=d&pREC_ID=1042228.

The second chapter, Oakland Military Institute: A Case Study, provides a deep dive into the community of OMI and daily life at the school. I provide the school's demographic profile along with a description and analysis of the military model. I show how the theory of military in education affects the students' lives in practice through curriculum, drills, uniforms, and discipline. I end this chapter with an overview of the discipline at OMI and how some staff and faculty have taken the initiative to correct damaging practices.

In the third and final chapter, Educational Choice, I finally bring the school choice debate into the case study of OMI. I give context to the school choice movement and I locate OMI within the larger debate of choice in public education and alternative charter models. I end by questioning the freedom of OMI families in their decision to send their children to a public military charter school in Oakland.

CHAPTER I: The ROOTS OF OMI

History of the Military in Primary and Secondary Education

While the first public military charter school did not open until 1980, the military has been involved in the American education system for over a century in various ways. The California National Guard, which is one of the reserve land force components of the United States Army and the sponsor of the Oakland Military Institute, has been running the California Cadet Corps (CACC) since 1911.[22]

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[22] "History," California Cadet Corps, accessed November 13, 2018, https://spark.adobe.com/page/ojDFFX0VuNLgF/

The aim of the CACC over a century ago was clear. At the time of its founding the report of the Adjutant General of California declared:

> One of the most important moves to strengthen the military spirit in this State and to awaken waning patriotism and love of the Flag and to furnish a young, virile and trained asset to the country, in case it should be needed in a time of national stress, was the passage of the high school cadet bill by the California Legislature of 1911.[23]

In short, the CACC was a program to prepare young boys and men for war. According to the CACC's website, "the original purpose of the program was to prepare commissioned officers for service in the United States Armed Forces."[24] The founding of the California Cadet Corps was accompanied by the establishment of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) in 1916. By 1925, the JROTC was operating in 63 U.S. public schools.[25] The onset of war in 1914 led to such paramilitary programs' growth and support. National military preparedness became a popular priority that spread to public schools and colleges.

The surge of youth military programs not only reflected the nation's sudden need for soldiers during wartime, but they also conveniently served as an avenue to the resolution of social ills. One of which was "moral rot associated with increased national wealth, increases in the numbers of immigrants who were seen as insufficiently loyal, and demands by labor made especially through strikes."[26] Supporters of military training for school-age youth at the time saw the paramilitary programs as a chance to cultivate a "spirit of obedience, of subservience to discipline."[27] A militarized education and the military in general were also seen by many as " a cure for the suspect masculinity of the immigrant, who could develop 'a manly readiness' through participation in school-based drills and army training."[28] During an era in U.S. history with a great influx of immigration, such programs were viewed as a great masculinizing tool as well as a chance to instill in newcomers a sense of duty or loyalty to their new home. More aggressive support arguably came from middle and upper-middle-class families who feared losing their sons to the fast approaching World War**.** If immigrants were pushed to military training they could take the place of their more affluent non-immigrant counterparts.[29] Arguments that alluded to immigrant military service and characterized paramilitary youth training programs as an "Americanizing" process were a common trope among high-ranking military service members. In 1916, Major General Wood made argument for military training in his address to the National Education Association:

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[23] California Military Department, *Report of the Adjutant General of California: July 1, 1910, to November 16, 1914* (California, 1911), 4.

[24] "History," California Cadet Corps, accessed November 13, 2018.

[25] Lesley Bartlett and Catherine Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference: Some Cultural Politics of Military Training in Public High Schools," *Urban Review,* 30, no. 2 (1998): 119-125, file:///Users/sarahstenger/Downloads/Disciplining_Social_Difference.pdf

[26] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 119-125.

> What is needed is some kind of training which will put all classes which go to make up the mass which is bubbling in the American melting pot, shoulder to shoulder, living under exactly the same conditions, wearing the same uniform, and animated by a common purpose.[30]

Despite much support for paramilitary youth training programs with a global conflict brewing oversees, there was adamant opposition as well. In 1916, Congress passed the National Defense Act which ratified the creation of the Junior ROTC in public schools.[31] In the face of such legislation and new laws establishing compulsory training in states like New York and New Jersey in the 1910s, many educators and school leaders protested the inculcation of militaristic ideas and the perceived attack on the democratic nature of public schooling. A 1916 article in the Atlantic City Review claimed that "such training will establish in childish minds military ideals—and military ideals not merely as a means to an end, but as an end in themselves."[32]

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[27] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 122.

[28] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 122-123.

[29] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 123.

[30] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 123.

[31] Brian Galaviz et al., "The Militarization and the Privatization of Public Schools," *Berkeley Review of Education*, 2, no. 1 (2011): 30, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4969649w

The flagship youth program of the National Guard, the California Cadet Corps, flourished during both World Wars and beyond.[33] However, at the start of the Vietnam War, the California Cadet Corps lost popularity and its funding as a result of the strong anti-war sentiment. Aside from the CACC, other military programs such as the JROTC suffered declining enrollment and enlistment in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the rise in protest to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.[34] Many military secondary schools and colleges were so unpopular that they closed down as a result of both low enrollment rates and drop in financial support from increasingly cynical donors.[35]

One example of a military educational institute that was impacted by the war was Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Virginia Tech has a Cadet Corps that has been central to the school's student body since its founding in 1872. In April of 1970, after the invasion of Cambodia, signs of an antiwar movement began to brew among the population of civilian students. Later in the month protesters disrupted a cadet afternoon drill.[36] Weeks after the disruption demonstrators occupied several of Virginia Tech's buildings where state police were called in to forcibly remove the students; protesters were piled into tractors and taken to jail.[37] The Virginia Tech website describes how the atmosphere on campus, which was once serene, became polarizing during such antiwar protests: "Civilian-Cadet relations were at an all-time low. Throughout all of this, the Corps maintained discipline and high morale while at the same time the Pennsylvania Military College disappeared."[38]

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[32] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 123.

[33] "History," California Cadet Corps, accessed November 13, 2018.

[34] John Alfred Coulter III, *Cadets on Campus: History of Military Schools of the United States* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2017), 214-217.

[35] Coulter III, *Cadets on Campus,* 214.

[36] Coulter III, *Cadets on Campus,* 217-219.

For the most part, such youth programs remained unpopular for years after the Vietnam war ended. Memories of campus protests, the antiwar movement, and the unwelcoming homecomings of soldiers dissuaded governments from re-funding the programs and discouraged parents from sending kids to military institutions. The re-emergence of military in education came later in the 20th century with the introduction of military sponsorship of public schooling, mainly through charter and magnet programs. The next section will detail the rise of public military charter schools specifically.

Public Military Charter Schools: A Timely Trend

While military *training* in private and public secondary schools flourished for the majority of the 20th century, public middle and high schools run by the military did not exist in the United States until 1980.[39] Franklin Military Academy, the first ever public military charter school, is located in Richmond, Virginia.[40] Consistent with every secondary public school that replicated its military model in the Unites States, Franklin is located in an underserved neighborhood and serves predominantly students of color. According to the Richmond School District records, for the past 3 years the student demographic profile has been 93-95% black.[41]

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[37] "A History of the Corps of Cadets," Virginia Tech Cadet Corps, accessed February 14, 2019, https://www.vtcc.vt.edu/about/history.html.

[38] John Alfred Coulter III, *Cadets on Campus: History of Military Schools of the United States* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2017), 206-217.

[39] Coulter III, *Cadets on Campus,* 223.

[40] "History Overview," Franklin Military Academy, accessed March 3, 2019, https://www.rvaschools.net/domain/1166.

While the records for the preceding decades are not available on the district's site, there are other indicators that imply that the school's demographic profile has been consistent since its founding. In a 1982 *Daily Press* Publication, Superintendent Richard Hunter, the founder of Franklin, made the news for his successful 6 year campaign of "school selling" in the district. This campaign was a decisive effort to entice whites to move back to the predominantly black school district. The article states, " When [Hunter] was promoted in 1976…[he was inspired to] sell the city's urban, predominantly black schools to a community in which many parents seemed set against them."[42] In 1976, the ratio of black students to white students was 80 percent to 20 percent. By 1981, as a result of the busing policies that were court-ordered, the district's white student population dropped to 14 percent.[43] Clearly, Hunter opened Franklin Military Academy at a time when the district was predominantly black. Another indicator that Franklin's current demographic profile has remained consistent comes from other local publications. Every image of Franklin students published in *The Daily Press* in the 1980s are images of black students in the cadet uniform.[44] Even without annual demographic records, the rhetoric in the media coverage of the opening of Franklin imply that it is a school for underprivileged children. In 1980, the Los Angeles Times refers to the first public military school in the nation as "a kind of escape valve, mainly for students in [trouble] who…[are] likely to be prime candidates for dropping out of school."[45] Franklin was a school that consistently enrolled marginalized students. This fact was not true for just the first public military charter school—it remained true for the schools that followed.

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[41] "School Profile," Franklin Military Academy, accessed March 2, 2019. https://www.rvaschools.net/Page/3300.

[42] "Richmond Superintendent's 'School Sell' Working," *Daily Press*, August 1, 1982, accessed March 5, 2019, https://www.newspapers.com/search/#query=%22franklin+military%22&dr_year=1979-1998&offset=26

[43] "Richmond Superintendent," *Daily Press*, accessed March 5, 2019.

[44] Daily Press Archives, Franklin Military Academy, 1980-2019, accessed March 26, 2019, https://dailypress.newspapers.com/search/#query=franklin+military+academy&offset=2

Two more public military schools opened in the 3 years following Franklin in New Jersey and Missouri respectively.[46] The national "trend" however, really took off at the turn of the 21st century with the help of a federal push to enlarge the JROTC budget and with a rising tide in market-based policies of the 1990s and early 2000s. As mentioned, the JROTC program was established in 1916, but the paramilitary youth training program in its current form was advanced by Former Secretary of State and retired General Colin Powell. In 1992, Powell encouraged then-President George H. W. Bush to more than double the size of the program from 1,500 to 3,500 JROTC programs.[47] Powell wrote in his auto-biography, *My American Journey*, that "Inner-city kids, many from broken homes, found stability and role models in Junior ROTC. They got a taste of discipline, the work ethic, and they experienced pride of membership in something healthier than a gang. ... Junior ROTC is a social bargain."[48]

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[45] "Public School Will Go Military," *Los Angeles Times,* August 17, 1980, accessed March 16, 2019, https://www.newspapers.com/image/387129845/?terms=%22franklin%2Bmilitary%22

[46] Allen McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," *In These Times* 32, no. 9 (September 2008): 17, http://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/195872715?accountid=11091.

[47] McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," 17.

[48] Colin Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: The Random House Ballantine Publishing Group, 1995), cited in Allen McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," *In These Times* 32, no. 9 (September 2008): 17-18, http://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/195872715?accountid=11091.

The school choice movement, which will be explained and discussed in more detail in Chapter III, led a push for alternative public schooling models and emerged in the decades following the opening of Franklin Military Academy. Accompanied by this choice movement and the wave of neoliberal policies of the 1990s which pushed for the privatization of public programs, the extreme budget increase of the JROTC programs transformed the turn of the 21st century into a ripe moment for the public military academy "trend." Starting in 1998, public military schools were opening at a rate of one to two each year.[49] Much like the first public military charter school, the dozen new schools that opened in 1998 and beyond are overwhelmingly located in urban, underserved neighborhoods.[50] Echoing Colin Powell's intentions for growing the JROTC budget, the military schools seem to fit the mold of institutions built for "inner-city kids."

Many have questioned the mushrooming of public military schools during wartime. Darlene Graminga, program director of the Truth in Recruiting Program, stated, "I hardly doubt that it's a coincidence that these schools are prospering at a time of war."[51] Some school administrators deny that the schools are feeder schools for enlistment in the army: "If the Defense Department is looking to us for recruitment, then they are making a bad investment," says Wright, the principal at Philadelphia Military Academy, whose particular school's enlistment rate after graduation ranges between 4 percent and 10 percent.[52] Even if public military schools do not push enlistment on their students, McDuffee points out that the JROTC programs still fall under the recruitment section of the Pentagon's budget. In his article, "No

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[49] McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," 18.

[50] McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," 18.

[51] McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," 17.

[52] McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," 18.

JROTC Left Behind," McDuffee goes on to point out a difference in public military charter school administrator opinion on recruiting strategy and higher-ups in the U.S. military and government:

> But in February 2000, former Secretary of Defense William Cohen told the House Armed Services Committee that JROTC is "one of the best recruiting devices we could have." And Powell wrote in *My American Journey*, "Liberal school administrators and teachers claimed that we were trying to 'militarize' education. Yes, I'll admit, the armed forces might get a youngster more inclined to enlist as a result of Junior ROTC. But society got a far greater payoff."[53]

When the Kenosha Military Academy in Wisconsin opened in 1998, effectively starting the second (stronger) wave of military charter approvals, the 9/11 attack on New York's Twin Towers had not yet happened.[54] However, any discussion of such schools cannot ignore the ongoing War on Terror which fits neatly into the timeline of the "trend" of public military charter schools. It is important to note that public perception of the military as an institution changed drastically after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Johnson, in her dissertation about the nexus of neoliberalism and the rise in military-style education, notes the transformation in U.S. culture in the 9/11 era:

> Increased surveillance, wiretapping, live television broadcasts of invasions and bombings, Cops, Americas Wildest Police Videos, America' s Most Wanted, bumper stickers that read, "Support the Troops" and "Got War?", metal detectors, unlawful searches, the NRA, Troops to Teacher programs and The War on Poverty, Crime, Drugs or Global Terrorism. U.S. culture is filled with the images and overtones of militarization.[55]

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[53] McDuffee, "No JROTC Left Behind," 18.

[54] "History," Kenosha Military Academy, accessed April 2, 2019, https://www.kusd.edu/indiantrail/academy/kma.htm

[55] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 14.

This rise is public support for the military and overall saturation of military symbols and rhetoric is nowhere more clear than in American sports. Long before the Colin Kaepernick kneeling scandal during the 2016 NFL season, scholars such as Mia Fisher and journalists such as Tom Dispatch, have explored how a military culture has converged with American sports culture. Fisher refers to the military symbolism, ceremony, and hyper-patriotic imagery in American sport, specifically the NFL, as a "silent re-empowerment of the neoliberal state in times of perpetual war."[56] The "spectacle" of war, the flag, and the military, she argues, reasserts both national identity and power of the institution of war----the U.S. military.[57] American journalist, Tom Dispatch, writes about the concrete examples the Fisher warns against:

> These days, you can hardly miss moments when, for instance, playing fields are covered with gigantic American flags, often unfurled and held either by scores of military personnel or civilian defense contractors. Such ceremonies are invariably touted as natural expressions of patriotism, part of a continual public expression of gratitude for America's "warfighters" and "heroes." These are, in other words, uncontroversial displays of pride, even though a study ordered by Republican Senators John McCain and Jeff Flake revealed that the U.S. taxpayer, via the Pentagon, has regularly forked over tens of millions of dollars ($53 million between 2012 and 2015 alone) to corporate-owned teams to put on just such displays.[58]

Dispatch goes on to joke that Americans regularly attend military parades and a baseball game breaks out.[59] He reflects Fisher's warning against such "spectacles" of war and the military in sports. What began as a post-9/11 campaign to show gratitude to the troops for their services in foreign conflicts, "stifling criticism of those wars by linking it to ingratitude," has transformed into a new norm of national reverence and patriotism.[60] This new way of being American, marketed by corporations no less, has reshaped how the public views the military through the lens of American sports.

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[56] Mia Fisher, "Commemorating 9/11 NFL-Style: Insights Into America's Culture of Militarism," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 38, no. 3 (2013): 201, https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723513515889.

[57] Fisher, "Commemorating 9/11 NFL-Style," 201.

[58] Tom Dispatch, "The Militarization Of Sports And The Redefinition Of Patriotism," *Huffington Post,* August 21, 2018, accessed April 5, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-militarization-of-sports-and-the-redefinition-of_b_5b7b1319e4b073b95dbc3768.

[59] Dispatch, "The Militarization of Sports."

Additionally, with the onset of the War on Terror, concrete financial support of the Department of Defense naturally shot up. The Pentagon's budget after 9/11 and for the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq grew by hundreds of billions of dollars within just a few years.[61] It can be argued that the change in public perception of the military in the 9/11 era, the possible recruitment needs of the army, the readily available funding from the government, and the overall saturation of military symbols, rhetoric, and culture in U.S. society created the perfect environment for public military charter schools to continue to thrive and be approved in districts and cities all over America. While the 9/11 era did not cause the creation of such schools, the national side effects of the attack in U.S. government, foreign policy, and culture elevated the status of the U.S. military which re-affirmed its role in many aspects of Americans lives, including public education. While attempting to establish a causal relationship between 9/11, the subsequent War on Terror, and the rising "trend" of public military charter schools is well outside this paper's range, it would be an interesting claim to further research and study.

Jerry Brown's Experiment

Oakland Military Institute, a public military charter school in California, was founded by then-Mayor Jerry Brown in the fall of 2001 and in the midst of the public military charter school trend. It is located in West Oakland with students from all over the Bay Area such as the Fruitvale and San Antonio districts of Oakland, Union City, Hayward, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Richmond, and even Stockton, California.[62] In the 2017-2018 school year, 729 students were enrolled in grades 6-12.[63] OMI has been open for over 17 years and continues to garner wide spread interest—many families are turned away due to the overwhelming enrollment numbers.[64]

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[60] Dispatch, "The Militarization of Sports."

[61] Brad Plumer, "America's Staggering Defense Budget, in Charts," *The Washington Post,* January 7, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/01/07/everything-chuck-hagel-needs-to-know-about-the-defense-budget-in-charts/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ab5bf82538d9

While OMI has been a constant in the Bay Area's public education system for almost two decades, the fight to open it in 2001 was not an easy won battle. Before Jerry Brown re-emerged onto the California political stage as Oakland Mayor in 1999, he campaigned on education reform, citing a failing public school system.[65] After winning the Mayoral race in 1998, he explained his hope for Oakland education in an interview, "The real victory will come when people feel so safe that they take the window bars off their windows and they move to Oakland to enroll their kids in school."[66]

However, after Brown entered office, he ran into bureaucratic red tape starting with the inability to persuade the school board to accept his choice for superintendent.[67] With time,

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[62] Oakland Military Institute, Western Association of Schools and Colleges Self-Study 2013-2014, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527608&type=d&pREC_ID=1042256.

[63] Oakland Military Institute, *Local Control and Accountability Plan Annual Update: 2018-2019,* 5 (Oakland, CA: 2018), https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527608&type=d&pREC_ID=1042264.

[64] "History," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

[65] Patricia Leigh Brown, "Oakland School's Military Bearing Rankles Some," *New York Times,* August 24. 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/24/us/oakland-school-s-military-bearing-rankles-some.html.

[66] Jerry Brown, quoted in Steve Harmon, "Jerry Brown's years as Oakland mayor set stage for political comeback," *Mercury News,* August 27, 2010, accessed February 12, 2019, https://www.mercurynews.com/2010/08/27/jerry-browns-years-as-oakland-mayor-set-stage-for-political-comeback/.

[67] Harmon, "Jerry Brown's Years," accessed February 12, 2019.

Brown seemed to give up on the existing education system, calling public high schools a "disaster."[68] At the turn of the century Mayor Brown shifted his focus to finding alternatives to Oakland public schools rather than pursuing the seemingly impossible challenge of reform. He proposed two charter schools in 1999, a performing arts school and a military academy which he promised to be rigorous and unapologetically committed to excellence.[69]

When Brown proceeded with the proposal for Oakland Military Institute, local opposition became apparent. Leaders in educational research questioned the high amount of money being allocated to a school with merely 160 students at the time of its establishment.[70] Jean Quan, a member of the Oakland School Board and later mayor, was critical of a school that seemed to prioritize discipline over resources.[71] Former local government officials also made their voices heard: "Many of us feel that giving the military, which uses force or threat of force to solve problems, legitimacy through public education is exactly counter to what Oakland needs,"[72] said Wilson Riles Jr., a former city council member turned nonprofit director at a regional Quaker humanitarian organization, American Friends Service Committee. In a letter to the state board, Wilson Riles Jr., a former Oakland City Council member, said the proposal represents the "continued and deepening influence of militarism and the legitimization of violence in our community."[73]

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[68] Jerry Brown, "A Few Good Schools," *Education Next, 1, no. 2* (Summer 2001), accessed January 2, 2019, https://www.educationnext.org/a-few-good-schools/

[69] Harmon, "Jerry Brown's Years," accessed February 12, 2019.

[70] Patricia Leigh Brown, "Oakland School's Military Bearing Rankles Some," *New York Times,* August 24. 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/24/us/oakland-school-s-military-bearing-rankles-some.html

[71] Brown, "Oakland School's Military Bearing Rankles Some," accessed February 3, 2019.

[72] Brown, "Oakland School's Military Bearing Rankles Some," accessed February 3, 2019.

[73] Martha Groves, "Oakland Military Charter School OKd," *Los Angeles Times,* December 7, 2000, accessed January 30, 2019, http://articles.latimes.com/2000/dec/07/news/mn-62437

The Oakland Unified School District and the Alameda School Boards echoed the community opposition and denied Mayor Brown's charter. Some cited that the charter could not be accepted by the board when opponents outnumbered supporters at public hearings.[74] As a result Brown went to the state for support and found it in then-governor Gray Davis. Davis, a former aide and consistent ally to Brown, was also a graduate of a military school.[75] The State Board of Education voted in favor of the charter on December 6, 2000 in a 6-0 vote.[76] A grant of $2 million was procured from the Department of Defense at the school's opening with the help of Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein and Republican Representative Jerry Lewis. The California National Grant gave $1.3 million.[77] The decision was the first of its kind, making OMI the first state-sponsored charter school in California history.[78]

OMI first opened on the decommissioned Oakland Army Base also—a stretch of land along the West Oakland waterfront just south of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.[79] According to OMI's website, AC Transit—the Easy Bay public transportation system---provided a dedicated bus line for student transportation to and from the base. In its first year, OMI received hundreds of applications from all over the Bay Area. Referencing OMI's history page, each prospective student was required to appear in front of a military member, faculty member, administrator, and representative from the Mayor's Office. A lottery was then held to finalize the freshmen class roster.[80]

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[74] Jerry Brown, "A Few Good Schools," *Education Next, 1, no. 2* (Summer 2001), accessed January 2, 2019, https://www.educationnext.org/a-few-good-schools/

[75] Groves, "Oakland Military Charter School OKd," accessed January 30, 2019.

[76] Groves, "Oakland Military Charter School OKd," accessed January 30, 2019.

[77] Brown, "Oakland School's Military Bearing Rankles Some," accessed February 3, 2019.

[78] "History," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

[79] "History," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

Jerry Brown's successful bid to open a public military charter school was also closely tied to his Catholic upbringing. He opened OMI to give anyone the chance to attend a school with the quality of a private Catholic education at zero cost.[81] Brown himself attended the private Catholic St. Ignatius in San Francisco, "where we had good teachers, solid discipline, a college-prep curriculum, and two years of ROTC training."[82] He was determined to create a similar program at a public charter school. The OMI Superintendent, Johnna Grell, echoed this Catholic inspired model in an interview:

> When the governor talks about the school, the reason he started it when he was mayor back then is because he went to Catholic school, he went to Jesuit [St. Ignatius], and so he felt like, "you can't have a free public Catholic school," but the military really took the place of the religion courses to teach the comradery, the discipline, the leadership, the structure. He just felt like that doctrine was mirrored by what he [received] at the Jesuit St. Ignatius.[83]

Superintendent Grell also received a private Catholic education in the Bay Area and began her teaching career as a Catholic school teacher. After her first year at OMI, she explained that she finally understood this interesting parallel between Catholic schools and military schools. The military component, like Catholic schools, "gives the kids something different…it teaches you how to be a good person and have self-discipline… Being a catholic-school person and coming to OMI was an easy fit."[84] She explains that she is "is committed to ensuring that other young people also find that path – even if their parents can't afford private school education."[85]

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[80] "History," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

[81] Jerry Brown, "A Few Good Schools," *Education Next, 1, no. 2* (Summer 2001), accessed January 2, 2019, https://www.educationnext.org/a-few-good-schools/

[82] Brown, "A Few Good Schools," accessed January 2, 2019.

[83] Johnna Grell, interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[84]Johnna Grell, interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

The aspect of "self-discipline" when it comes to Catholic and military education raises interesting questions about Brown's original intent to bring discipline to Oakland and Bay Area youth. Both institutions have a certain reputation of self-discipline and structure. One school in California even found a way to combine the two. St. Catherine's in Anaheim is a Catholic military school run by Dominican nuns who claim that the military side of St. Catherine's is a convenient way of getting the students to behave while teaching them leadership and patriotism.[86] Despite the uniforms and drills, the emphasis is on religion and self-discipline. This example of St. Catherine's illustrates the utility that both the military culture and Catholic tradition offer in a shared value of self-discipline. It also provides a window into Jerry Brown's vision for OMI. He clearly wanted to replicate his Catholic school experience from his days at St. Ignatius where structure and discipline were central to education.

Jerry Brown's experiment in the Oakland school system was to bring a structured model of education to a district and city which he felt was sorely lacking. Just two years after OMI opened, Brown visited the campus and railed against critics who had tried to block the charter's approval: "I think they would rather see these kids fail than have them succeed in a conceptual framework that is contrary to their particular set of beliefs…These kids have a tough time. How are you going to straighten them out if you don't put some formation in their life?"[87] This experiment to "put formation" into the lives of Oakland youth continues today, especially with the help of Jerry Brown's faithful donors.

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[85] "Superintendent: Johnna Grell," Oakland Military Institute, accessed September 29, 2018, https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=694995&type=u&pREC_ID=1617576

[86] Richard Beene, "The Power and the Glory : Military and Spiritual Disciplines Work in Tandem at St. Catherine's in Anaheim," *Los Angeles Times,* November 26, 1988, accessed March 17, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-11-26-li-312-story.html.

Follow The Money

Given its charter school status, OMI receives various types of funding both public and private. The school, as a public school, receives average daily attendance (ADA) funding based on its average of 719.78 students in the 2018-2019 fiscal year.[88] The ADA funds are a part of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which the California Department of Education uses to determine OMI's public funding. In all, OMI received $7,846,691 from the state for the 2018-2019 year.[89] In addition to regular ADA, OMI also participates in state and federal programs which entail various grants. According to the WASC self-report, some of these programs include the State Special Education Fund and the National School Lunch Program and California Nutrition Program.[90] In all, these state and federal program mandates contribute more than 1.6 million to the annual budget of OMI.[91] The largest source of program funding aside from the LCFF, is the funding from the National Guard. The California National Guard, which operates under the Army National Guard, is a reserve component funded by the Department of Defense.

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[87] "Ex-Governor Bent On Political Re-invention," *Los Angeles Times,* August 4, 2003, accessed March 23, 2019, file:///Users/sarahstenger/Downloads/The_Los_Angeles_Times_Mon__Aug_4__2003_.pdf.

[88] California Department of Education, *School Profile: Oakland Military Institute, College Preparatory Academy,* accessed April 4, 2019, https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cds=01612590130617.

[89] California Department of Education, *School Profile,* accessed April 4, 2019.

[90] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges Self-Study 2013-2014*, 11, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527608&type=d&pREC_ID=1042256.

[91] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges,* 11-13.

According to the school's WASC report, the money from the National Guard adds up to more than $300,000 annually and is used to pay for "personnel, services, and supplies that support the broader Leaders of Character program, including outdoor education, [the] school "merit" system which rewards students for good behavior, and personnel who support [the] citizenship program (Dean of Students, Director of Admissions and Enrollment, Operations Director, etc)."[92]

On top of the state and federal funds and those raised by the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), OMI benefits from private donors as well. Jerry Brown conducts an annual fundraising luncheon which helps raise money for operational and capital expenses. The budget shows that more than $500,000 is raised annually for the school's general operations and more than $750,000 is raised annually for capital and endowment efforts.[93] As a charter school, private funding is not uncommon, but it is important to note that OMI's private funding profile is exceptionally large on account of its relationship with Jerry Brown, who has held both the mayorship and governorship during the last 18 years of OMI's existence. Brown has even attracted media attention and criticism for his reliance on special interests and for the deep-pocketed donors who sponsor OMI.

In the first three years as Attorney General of California, Brown was able to raise a suspicious amount of money, over $7 million dollars for OMI, which raised questions of special interests attempting to buy political influence from the soon-to-be governor of California.[94] Contributors to OMI during this period included Walmart, Bank of America, Pacific Gas &

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[92] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges*, 11-13.

[93] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges,* 11-13.

[94] Robert Gammon, "Jerry Brown Raised $12 Million for His Two Oakland Schools," *East Bay Express*, April 28, 2010, accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/jerry-brown-raised-12-million-for-his-two-oakland-schools/Content?oid=1712012.

Electric, casinos, and Hollywood producer Stephen Bing.[95] One of the biggest contributors was Texas oil and gas magnate, T. Boone Pickens, who gave thousands of his own dollars to OMI.[96] In 2009, an advisor to one major donor, who requested to remain anonymous, admitted that giving to OMI allows special interests to appear above political fray: "It looks altruistic rather than something that's sheer raw politics…[Groups are giving to Brown's school] with the hope that he will keep an open mind should you need to communicate with him in the future [as governor]."[97] Brown, himself, has always claimed integrity, asserting that all his fundraising efforts for OMI have been for the good of the kids: "This is the Lord's work," Brown said, keeping with his spiritual inspiration for the school's mission, "…I'm going to continue [fundraising]. As long as I am still breathing and I can make it work, I will."[98] Aside from the special interest contributions that may or may not influence California politics through Jerry Brown and the charity loophole, there are other supporters of OMI who may have a stake influencing the lives of OMI students.

One organization that raises the question of such an influence is the Council for a Strong America--- a national, bipartisan nonprofit comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who, according to the organization's website, "promote solutions that ensure our next generation of

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[95] Shane Goldmacher, "Donors Flock to Brown's Charities," *Los Angeles Times,* November 3, 2009, accessed March 23, 2019, file:///Users/sarahstenger/Downloads/The_Los_Angeles_Times_Tue__Nov_3__2009_%20(1).pdf.

[96] Goldmacher, "Donors Flock to Brown's Charities," accessed March 23, 2019.

[97] Goldmacher, "Donors Flock to Brown's Charities," accessed March 23, 2019.

[98] Goldmacher, "Donors Flock to Brown's Charities," accessed March 23, 2019.

Americans will be citizen-ready."[99] One of the branches of *Council for a Strong America* (CSA) is *Mission: Readiness*. This subdivision was established to confront the declining numbers of eligible young people for military service. According to their report titled, "Too Fat to Fight," "71 percent of today's young adults ages 17 to 24 cannot quality for military service because they are not academically prepared, are too overweight, or have a record of crime or drug abuse."[100] Aside from the 2008 recession---a time when the report recalls a reduction in the challenges that the nation's 15,000 military recruiters face in meeting their quotas for signing up qualified individuals---the Council for a Strong America declares the obesity of children as, first and foremost, a threat to national security. The members of *Mission: Readiness*---750 retired admirals, generals, and other top military leaders--- are united under the belief that the strength of the country depends on a strong military. In the same report, the retired military members call the eligibility crisis a matter of life and death when it comes to the battlefield. The report reads:

> For office workers in civilian life, having a colleague who is overweight may raise the cost of their health care but is not likely to threaten their safety. But for military personnel the physical abilities of their colleagues can be the difference between life and death. Consider Corporal Todd Corbin: Running through the line of fire, [Corporal Todd] Corbin grabbed his wounded patrol leader and threw him over his shoulder. He then sprinted back to his Humvee, firing at enemies as he ran. Corbin ran back and forth several times through the kill zone, moving everyone he could out of the withering fire and loaded them into his vehicle." For his bravery, Corporal Corbin received the Navy Cross in April of 2006.[101]

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[99] "About Mission: Readiness", *Council for a Strong America,* accessed December 2, 2018, https://www.strongnation.org/missionreadiness/about-us.

[100] Mission: Readiness: Military Leaders for Kids, *Too Fat to Fight: Retired Military Leaders Want Junk Food Out of America's Schools,* 1-3, (Washington, DC: 2010), http://cdn.missionreadiness.org/MR_Too_Fat_to_Fight-1.pdf

[101] Mission: Readiness: Military Leaders for Kids, *Too Fat to Fight, 3.*

The report goes on to explain that this crisis is largest among poorer children, given that the free lunches available at public and charter schools often are high in fat and sugar content.[102]

In 2017, *Mission:Readiness* leaders visited Oakland Military Institute to see firsthand how their after-school program is keeping kids healthy. In an article by Council for a Strong America, OMI is praised for the after school activities with a focus physical fitness and nutrition.[103] During the visit, Vice Admiral Jody Breckenridge stated her support and explained how "boosting attendance and graduation rates so that students will be prepared for whatever career they choose, including the military, will go a long way towards protecting our national security in the long run."[104] Vice Admiral Jody Breckenridge is a member of OMI's Board of Directors and is also a member of the Council for a Strong America's *Mission: Readiness.*

While the relationship between OMI and A Council for a Strong America's *Mission: Readiness* organization may not be a smoking gun for recruitment targeting of OMI's students, it certainly complicates the nature of private funding at the public military charter school. By following the money that comes in to OMI, special interests and multi-billion dollar corporations are exposed. Whether or not Jerry Brown was influenced as governor by the millions he received in funding for OMI, the murky waters of big money in public education ultimately raises the question of the interests allowed to influence the educational lives of OMI's students. How equitable is a public school's education that takes money from the likes of Walmart, big banks, and an organization like *Mission: Readiness* that looks to America's youth for the future of national security?

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[102] Mission: Readiness: Military Leaders for Kids, *Too Fat to Fight, 6-7.*

[103] "California's After-School Programs in Jeopardy," *Council for a Strong America,* May 25, 2017, accessed November 20, 2018, https://www.strongnation.org/articles/433-california-s-after-school-programs-in-jeopardy

[104] "California's After-School Programs in Jeopardy," *Council for a Strong America,* accessed November 20, 2018.

CHAPTER II: OAKLAND MILITARY INSTITUTE: A CASE STUDY

The Community of OMI

Questions of educational equity at OMI go beyond the sources of funding. An examination of OMI as a case study for public military charter schools, reveals a clearer picture of the nature of equity in education. By understanding the community of OMI and its innerworkings, a better understanding of the military model within the framework of public schools can be reached.

Seventeen years after its opening as the first ever state-sponsored charter school, OMI has remained true to then-Mayor Brown's vision of providing a military-style education to Oakland's disadvantaged youth. The majority of OMI students are working class students of color. According to the 2017-18 demographic profile of OMI, the student body is 57% Latino, 19% Black, 18% Asian, 4% White, and 2% other.[105] The data on economic status of OMI students reinforces the idea that the charter school serves those in need. According to the Local Control and Accountability Act, of the 719 students enrolled in OMI in 2017-18, 611 (85 percent) were classified as either low-income, English Learner, Foster Care, and/or homeless.[106] The OMI WASC self-report also touched on the financial strains of the school's community, stating that the school serves some of the poorest areas of West Oakland, the Fruitvale and San Antonio areas of Oakland, Union City, Hayward, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Berkeley, and Richmond, California.[107] The average income level for an OMI family of four is $22,000, well below the federal poverty line.[108] Following in the footsteps of the public military charter schools which came before it, OMI serves predominantly low-income students who come from underserved communities.

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[105] Oakland Military Institute, *Local Control and Accountability Plan Annual Update: 2018-2019,* 2 (Oakland, CA: 2018), https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527608&type=d&pREC_ID=1042264

[106] Oakland Military Institute, *Local Control and Accountability Plan Annual Update,* 2.

[107] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges*, 4.

This makes OMI an important area of study given the presence of its military model. At the outset of this investigation, I hypothesized that a significant amount of OMI graduates directly enlisted in the U.S. military. Given the fact that most students were working class students of color, this raised dangerous questions of a possible "poverty draft" that was starting as early as middle and high school with children as young as 11. The term 'poverty draft' was coined in the years following the Vietnam War to connote the belief that the enlisted ranks of the military were made up of young people with limited socio-economic opportunities. In his book, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam,* Christian Appy argues that the draft directed working-class children to the armed forced and their wealthier peers toward college.[109] Because of the availability of deferments for college students and other wealthier Americans, Appy did not see the draft as compulsory for *all,* just the economically disadvantaged. In his acclaimed work, "The Poverty Draft," Jorje Mariscal brings the issue into the 21st century and explains how despite the end of the draft, the all-volunteer army is not entirely voluntary after all, given the extreme push many underprivileged youth experience.[110]

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[108] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges*, 4.

[109] Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 42.

[110] Jorje Mariscal, "The Poverty Draft," *Sojourners Magazine* 36, no. 6 (2007): 34, http://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/212849329?accountid=11091

Mariscal argues that because of the limited opportunities available to the poor and working class in America, such as access to higher education, enlisting in the army is often the last option.[111]

While this thesis does not attempt to investigate if a poverty draft indeed does exist in America, it is clear that OMI graduates are *not* overwhelmingly choosing enlistment after graduation. While around a dozen OMI graduates apply to military colleges or enlist in the reserves, the number is not staggeringly higher than public schools in the area.[112] When it comes to postsecondary trajectories of OMI students, many attend community college, trade school, and 4 year universities. In OMI's mission, college is stated as its central goal: "Using a military framework, the goal of OMI is to graduate cadets who are capable of meeting the admissions requirements for any college in the nation."[113] In an interview at the opening of the school, Jerry Brown explained that OMI "is the exact opposite of a boot camp… the goal is to enable every student to qualify for the University of California, Harvard or Yale."[114]

College definitely is a visible focus of OMI, which considers itself a college preparatory school. Quincy Smith, the college counselor, explained the new initiatives that OMI is taking to expose more students to college campuses through their new college touring programs. Their northern California college tour is called the "get up," and the southern California tour is called, "the get down."[115] Smith also mentioned how many OMI students are very unfamiliar with the world of higher-education and have a hard time imagining themselves as college students one day. He recalled an information session on college tours for OMI juniors. He recommended that the cadets take advantage of their close proximity to UC Berkeley and other Bay Area schools such as Laney Community College by walking onto the campuses during a weekend and maybe even sitting in on a class. “They sat there confused and finally asked me, ‘We can just walk on to the campus? And not get in trouble?’.”[116] The fact that many cadets were unaware of the public nature of college campuses helped Smith to gain a better understanding of his job as their mentor and college counselor. “They aren’t even aware of their opportunities. It’s my job to make them aware.”[117]

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[111] Mariscal, "The Poverty Draft," 32-35.

[112] Quincy Smith, interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[113] "Mission," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 17, 2019.

[114] Brown, "A Few Good Schools," accessed January 2, 2019.

[115] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

If military careers are not pushed onto OMI cadets, as evident in the investment in a college counseling office, what role does the military play in the post-secondary options of students? According to the college counselor, Quincy Smith, the military component helps to “straighten out” students through discipline and drill which can lead to cadets being more prepared for life after OMI. “Life is not easy,” explained Smith, “I tell kids all the time that after the bell rings on June 9th [graduation day], ‘you’re just another person in the world, and no one will care about you as much as we do.’”[118] Smith went on to say that the military framework of OMI successfully prepares cadets for this reality. In terms of concrete statistics of post-secondary trajectories of OMI cadets, 63% go to 4-year universities and the rest either go to community college, trade school, or they enlist in the army.[119]

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[116] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[117] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[118] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[119] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

If military service is not the majority choice for OMI graduates, is enlistment discouraged at all? How do OMI administrators and faculty view military service in relation to other options such as direct employment, trade school, or college? According to Superintendent Grell, "we present everything on an equal playing field, because unlike some other schools, we understand that college is not for everyone." [120] This conflation of military service with other options was reflected in the interview with the college counselor as well: "While there is no push to join the army at all," Smith noted, "we simply prepare students for whatever path they choose. If they want to join [the army], that is their choice and we are here to help them achieve that if they wish."[121] Smith explained that when cadets join the military after graduation, it usually is with the army reserves.[122]

For the school's Commandant, Colonel Peter Cross, the number of graduates who do not choose to enlist proves that OMI does not push kids to the military. However, Cross noted that perhaps the rare interest in joining indicates that military service is at times undersold to OMI students. He expressed interest in presenting cadets more military options upon graduation. In an interview he explained how many times the students are being exposed to such opportunities too late in their OMI career: "Now I will tell you one of the initiatives that I'm working on is providing the cadets post-graduate options…You don't present those options junior and senior year, it's too late. You need to cultivate your CV and resume starting your freshmen year in high school."[123]

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[120] Johnna Grell, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.
[121] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[122] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[123] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

Of all the administrators interviewed, all agreed that OMI, as a public military charter school, exposes students to a military culture that other schools simply don't possess. One manifestation of this culture comes in the form of recruitment. As mentioned, OMI students are not funneled into the military, but this does not preclude their exposure to more military recruitment than other high schools. One form of such recruitment is the annual career fairs that take place at the school where every branch of the armed services is welcomed to inform OMI students of future opportunities.[124]

Another form of recruitment is a Coast Guard mentorship program at OMI. Just like the National Guard's youth program which explicitly targets "at-risk" youth, the Coast Guard's Partnership in Education program collaborates with local school systems, "especially in communities with large, underserved populations, and creates student awareness of the Coast Guard's mission and people."[125] According to the Coast Guard's Partnership in Education mission, members of the Coast Guard work directly with students to heighten their awareness of traditional Coast Guard values and "inform students of the many rewarding careers offered by the Coast Guard."[126] Several objectives of the program include concrete recruitment activities such as providing job shadowing experiences, assisting in employment/training seminars, sponsoring tours to provide work exposure, conducting tours of the Coast Guard unit/cutter, and discussing career opportunities.[127] It is important to note that these objectives are not the only activities involved in such mentorships. Other aims of the program include the encouragement of extracurricular clubs and tutoring in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields.[128] However, it is clear that recruitment is a main pillar of these mentorships, and since OMI is one of the partner schools that facilitates relationships between Coast Guard mentors and OMI students, it is clear that OMI students are vulnerable to these recruitment motives. When speaking to Superintendent Grell about the mentorship program, she explained how it was an experience that helps OMI students picture their futures in a more positive and clear way.

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[124] Quincy Smith, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[125] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, United States Coast Guard, "Partnership in Education," accessed April 2, 2019, https://www.uscg.mil/Resources/Civil-Rights/Partnership-in-Education-Program/.

[126] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Partnership in Education," accessed April 2, 2019.

[127] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Partnership in Education," accessed April 2, 2019.

> We're trying to show our students that "you can see yourself or someone that looks like you or someone that has been in your shoes in the career that you're interested in"…we think it's really important to make that match… The Coast Guard folks come and talk to the [students] and say 'this is how I got here. I was in your shoes and this is what I chose. I suggest it or I don't suggest it.[129]

Grell went on to note that most OMI parents do not have college degrees, and so any form of career mentorship, whether that be with Coast Guard members or civilian adults, is a step in the right direction.[130]

The community of OMI is comprised of overwhelmingly minority students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While it is clear that graduates of OMI are not choosing to enlist directly in the military in large numbers, it is clear that students are being exposed to recruitment and military career options in ways that other public school students are not. The racial and economic demographics of OMI are not unusual for a West Oakland middle and high school, yet noticeably less white than surrounding public schools. Oakland Technical School, one while east of OMI, is 25.5% white. And while McClymond's High School, less than a mile south of OMI, is 4.7% white, OMI's student profile is only 2.7% white. Compared to the overall Oakland Unified School District student population which is 10.3 % White, OMI has a strikingly less amount of white enrolled students.[131]

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[128] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Partnership in Education," accessed April 2, 2019.

[129] Johnna Grell, interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[130] Johnna Grell, interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

Given the ethnic makeup of OMI compared to other public schools in Oakland, it is clear that working class students of color at OMI are being exposed to this military influence in ways that white students of Oakland and the Bay Area are not. While it is too far a reach, and arguably false, to claim that the OMI school administrators are actively seeking out disadvantaged kids to enroll in OMI, it is evident from the rhetoric used in the mission statements of the California National Guard Youth Program and the Coast Guard Partnership in Education that these larger youth programs were created to target "at-risk" youth. Despite the many positive aspects of these youth programs, such as tutoring and support for extracurriculars, it would be irresponsible to ignore the obvious recruitment goals of such organizations. As pointed out by Superintendent Grell, the parents of most OMI students do not hold college degrees. This means that many students may lack an authority figure in their lives who can speak to personal experience in the college and career decision process. Thus, the mentorships with members of the military become that much more influential in the lives of OMI students who, as Grell said, "look up to the Coast Guard folks and see themselves reflected in the older mentors."[132] The fact that the California National Guard and the Coast Guard target disadvantaged students in theory and in practice, raises an ethical question of an over-exposure to military recruitment and influence in underserved and "at-risk" communities.

Drill And Ceremony

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[131] California Department of Education, *District Profile: Oakland Unified School District*, accessed April 4, 2019, https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cds=01612590000000.

[132] Johhna Grell, interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

Besides an exposure to military recruitment and influence from service members, how else does the military component affect OMI students? The answer to this question comprises the crux of my research. At the start of the investigation into OMI as a case study of public military charter schools, I assumed that the main effect of the military-style model was a funneling of young students into the armed forces. However, as noted in the previous section, despite the heightened recruitment activities that take place at OMI, students are more likely to attend college, a trade school, or immediately begin their career than they are to enlist in the military. This realization begged the question: how are the students of OMI affected by the military model of their middle and high school? After spending significant time among the staff, teachers, and alumni, I found that it is not what takes place after OMI that requires more investigation, but it is what takes place within the walls of the school that matters. The bay area youth who attend OMI and come from disadvantaged backgrounds are being exposed to military culture from ages 11-18 in ways that their white affluent counterparts avoid.

Military culture refers to the curriculum, values, rhetoric, uniform, labels, and customs that comprise the "military" component of OMI. These factors are what form the students' characters and identities in ways that achieve the school's aim of self-discipline and structure promoted by Jerry Brown, the National Guard, and OMI administrators. Calling attention to the exposure of military culture strays from the usual criticism of Oakland Military Institute. Most critics point out the stagnant test scores, the leeching of public school funds, or a possible ploy to churn out army recruits.[133] This thesis, however, does not focus on the academic and career outcomes of a military-style school nor does it seek to settle the public vs. charter school debate. Instead, the purpose of this work is to study the effects of a military-model of education on the identities and characters of its students, especially given the ethnic and socio- economic demographics of the community.

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[133] Coulter III, *Cadets On Campus,* 238-239.

The curriculum of OMI in regards to regular subjects like math and science are more or less comparable to its neighboring public schools. The Leaders of Character (LOC) curriculum, however, is unique to the military institute. OMI's curriculum includes Leaders of Character classes which are mandatory for all grades.[134] LOC classes are taught exclusively by military staff members and cover topics that pertain to military history and tradition. The crux of the LOC program aims to develop the cadets' characters as they navigate life at OMI and beyond.[135]

One example of a topic that an LOC class might cover at OMI is the history and significance of the American Flag. In an interview the OMI commandant, Colonel Cross, he spoke about significance of the flag. He expressed how protest is a right that U.S. service members fight to protect.[136] He went on to tell a story that occurred before he arrived at OMI which he heard from other staff members.[137] This event happened over 2 years ago but it is a story that not only Cross recounted but also a middle school teacher, Ms. Sheridan, who was interviewed. According to Sheridan, during morning formation one day, cadets did not salute the flag but knelt down instead to protest the lack of language courses offered at OMI.[138] Students wanted French to be added to the curriculum alongside Spanish. The teacher noted how there was a disconnect between the student's desires and their understanding of protest. It was apparent to her that the students did not understand what the flag represents. The OMI military staff alongside the civilian administrators made the decision to add a course about the flag into the military curriculum.[139] According to the teacher, the students were taught how the flag is not simply something to protest when there is a disagreement about how OMI is run, but that it is a national symbol that is deserving of respect.[140] After that, students stopped kneeling during morning formation and took other routes to seek the addition of French as a language offered.[141]

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[134] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 9 (Oakland, CA: 2018), https://4.files.edl.io/4281/08/31/18/221629-5bffb983-0d93-4839-a634-31ca83d83207.pdf

[135] "Mission," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

[136] Colonel Peter Cross, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[137] Colonel Peter Cross, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[138] Ciara Sheridan, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

While OMI administrators did not prohibit students from kneeling during morning formation, there was prompt action taken to impress upon the students in an academic setting a specific teaching of the flag's representation and connection to the traumatic experiences of war, redefining how to show gratitude to the military staff at OMI. This addition to the curriculum was not an explicit punishment, but the prompt action implies a sense of urgency that the OMI administration and military staff felt to respond to a sign of, what Colonel Cross called, disrespect to the military staff.[142] This story of how the Leadership of Character curriculum reasserted the importance of the flag as a symbol is eerily similar to the threat some feel when football players kneel during the National Anthem. Critics claim that kneeling before the flag is disrespectful to America's troops, and many NFL owners are threatened by the angered fans which translates to a loss in profit.[143] The intolerance of protest and deviation from tradition by the NFL is mirrored in OMI's military administration's prompt response to kneeling students.

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[139] Jonna Grell, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[140] Ciara Sheridan, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[141] Ciara Sheridan, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[142] Colonel Peter Cross, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[143] Dispatch, "The Militarization Of Sports," accessed April 4, 2019.

Deviation from custom and tradition at OMI was met with a curriculum change aimed at reasserting the need for the ultimate respect for the flag during formation.

The curriculum change was successful in its attempt to prevent similar protests that military staff viewed as disrespectful to the flag and their service. More than a year after the first incident, the admissions officer of the school, Ms. Winter, recalled how OMI basketball players were briefed in an assembly about their rights to kneel during the National Anthem. They were told that they were free to stand, kneel, or sit, "and we, [the faculty and staff], were anxious to see if students would kneel. We were all pleasantly surprised when they all stood the night of the big game."[144] In the eyes of the Colonel Cross, the unanimous standing before the flag the night of the basketball game conveyed to him that the OMI students have a higher sense of patriotism than students of other schools. In an interview, he said:

> Compared to schools like Oakland Tech, I'm sure [patriotism is] higher here because we post the colors in the morning, they see [military staff]…I can't help but think that we have some impact…When that controversy was coming up, the kids in the sporting event were given the option to kneel and nobody kneeled and so that can be a indicator that patriotism is higher than the average public school. I thought that was pretty cool actually that they didn't [kneel].[145]

Cross still thinks, however, that there can be room for improvement at OMI regarding the patriotic feelings of the students. Regarding a recent Pass in Review Parade on Veterans Day, Cross remarked that the cadets looked wonderful, but there were a number of cadets who did not come in the right uniform. This was after Cross made a decisive effort to remind cadets and their families of the correct dress code for the parade, including a letter home to parents and opening up his military clothing store for 3 weeks prior to make sure they had an opportunity to receive the correct items. After this incredible emphasis on ensuring that cadets dressed appropriately for the Pass in Review, Cross explained that on the day of the Parade, "there were still cadets out of uniform. So is that patriotism? Probably not. We still struggle. I don't think that just because we're a military academy that it is an automatic default position that everybody's patriotic. It's still something that we need to cultivate."[146] The idea of cultivating a patriotic spirit is not only present in the LOC classes but in the second pillar of OMI's mission: Leadership. In the school's philosophy statement, the second pillar reads as follows:

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[144] Admissions Officer, interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[145] Colonel Peter Cross, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

> The military framework of the school develops LEADERSHIP and promotes a sense of pride and community as it requires cadets to wear a proper complete uniform each school day and begin each day with a formation that includes patriotic exercises. All cadets participate as members of the California Cadet Corps, and are assigned to units within a military chain of command (squads, platoons, companies, and battalions within the Corps of OMI Cadets). Cadets assume increased responsibility through various positions of leadership during their tenure at OMI. Each academic classroom uses military protocols and cadet leadership structures to promote good order and discipline. Cadets also learn military customs and courtesies and achieve promotions and awards for their accomplishments. The military dimension of the school promotes patriotic spirit and respect for the democratic ideals of our society.[147]

Other than a curriculum that includes LOC classes aimed specifically at cultivating a military culture and a sense of patriotism, OMI students are exposed to military imagery, traditions, and symbols through the military-style uniform. The uniforms of OMI serve multiple purposes. On one hand, the free uniforms alleviate a very heavy financial burden that all parents confront with constantly growing school-aged children. According to the Student Handbook, "All supplies, materials, and equipment needed to participate in educational activities shall be provided to cadets free of charge. OMI does not use a "fee waiver" policy to make cadet fees permissible. OMI does not require the purchase of any uniform or logoed articles of clothing."[148] The uniforms, provided by the school, are worn daily which prevents families from spending money on school clothes.

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[146] Colonel Peter Cross, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[147] "Mission," Oakland Military Institute, accessed March 22, 2019.

The uniforms also can be a great equalizing factor among students from varying financial backgrounds. In her dissertation studying the Military Educational Institute of Eastmoore, California, Brooke Johnson found that many students preferred uniforms because it prevented bullying. She observed how uniform alleviated peer pressure and material competitiveness among students. Since buying clothing is often a financial burden, Johnson noted how the uniform thwarts teasing based on material inequality.[149]

Another point of attraction for parents and families regarding uniforms is the connotation of discipline. When asked what unique quality the military component of OMI offers to the school, Commandant Cross answered, "structure and discipline---we have military drills and we have uniforms. Not like your average Oakland public school."[150] This sentiment was echoed across several interviews from OMI staff and alumni. Estefanie, the executive assistant to Grell and an alumnus herself, recalled how her mother wanted to send her to a private school but lacked the financial means.[151] OMI was a close second with the structure, discipline, and uniforms that completed the quasi-private school experience.

Uniforms at any school serve these roles as budget savers, down players of class inequality, and symbols of structure and discipline. The uniforms at OMI, however, are not like any other private school. They are cadet uniforms modeled after the military. Cadet uniforms are required to wear varying types of uniforms which pertain to their class, their ranking, and the occasion. Class A, Class B, Grizzly Dress, Physical Training, Utility, and Class Pledge are all examples of the many types of uniforms required of cadets at different occasions and stages of their time at OMI. Each Class represents a different level of ranking which is achieved through testing at marked times throughout the seven grade years of OMI's middle and high school.[152] Cadets are always required to wear their Cadet identification badge which signals their ranking.[153] The military uniforms of OMI are distinct from other school uniforms given they are modeled after the military style and represent cadet rankings within the military structure of the school.

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[148] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 17 (Oakland, CA: 2018), https://4.files.edl.io/4281/08/31/18/221629-5bffb983-0d93-4839-a634-31ca83d83207.pdf

[149] Johnson, "From School Ground to Battle Ground," 88-93.

[150] Colonel Peter Cross, Interview by author, November 27, 2018.

[151] Estefanie Fuentes, Interview by author, November 26, 2018.

How does this factor play into the identities of the cadets? Such symbols of rank serve to re-frame the students as cadets who are a part of a military hierarchy. The donning of a uniform symbolizes the donning of a military identity which is central to the OMI structure. As mentioned above, uniforms can serve to equalize students from varying financial classes, but on the other hand, the conformity of the military uniform also serves to re-imagine the identities of the students into the rank and file under the authority of the larger military structures of the National Guard and Cadet Corps.

Furthermore, the cadet names, ranks, and labels re-affirm this change and morphing of identity especially within the frameworks of the daily drill and ceremony at OMI. Students are never referred to by just their name. Names are either prefaced by the title 'cadet' or students are just referred to as 'cadet'. Given that cadets also have multiple opportunities to test into a higher rank, other possible titles include squad leaders, platoon sergeants, platoon leaders, company leader, batallion leader, and regimental leader.[154] All cadets are also divided into different military companies upon their entrance to OMI, of which they remain until graduation. The names of the companies are the Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, and Music companies, also known as the TAC teams.[155] Throughout a cadet's time at OMI, they will hold different roles during drills and ceremonies pertaining to their company, rank, and possible leadership positions. Daily drills take place at OMI called formations which include a raising of colors, a bugle call, and a salute. At times, special occasions such as Veterans Day requires a Pass in Review which entails stricter formation and drill guidelines:

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[152] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 12.

[153] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 12.

> OMI conducts approximately five Pass in Review ceremonies each school year. Participation in these ceremonies is an essential part of the OMI culture. Cadets receive academic grades for their full and active participation. Part of full and active participation in the ceremony is being in the proper and complete uniform and participating in the company Esprit de Corps "shout outs," participating in the drill commands, and marching with pride (in step to the music/cadence). Cadets failing to participate actively and fully in a Pass in Review ceremony are subject to failing grades for LOC/PE at the semester.[156]

The cadet names, ranks, and labels, especially within the framework of participation in military drill and ceremony, all foster a transformation from student to cadet within the military culture of OMI. The identities of OMI students are successfully re-imagined as part and parcel of the broader military framework.

It is important to note that OMI cadets do not just start school in the fall of 6th grade with the background knowledge of military lingo, courtesy, and tradition. All of this necessary military education comes in the form of a two week crash course at Camp San Luis Obispo (Camp SLO). Camp SLO is a two week overnight summer entrance camp that every OMI cadet must attend before they enter the school.[157] It is an orientation designed to prepare prospective students in military protocols, procedures, and overall academic preparation.[158] According to the OMI handbook, "pledges must demonstrate a willingness to 'join' the company, cooperate with cadet leaders, and participate actively in company routines, sports, and ceremonies."[159] Most OMI students will take part in this camp in the summer after 5th grade at the approximate age of 10 or 11.[160] When asked about the average OMI student's entrance and transition to OMI life, Admissions Officer Ms. Winter mentioned how many times the young cadets seem fearful of the military component of OMI. She explained how it is not uncommon to see 5th graders crying as they board the bus to the mandatory 2 week overnight summer camp, Camp SLO.[161]

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[154] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 16-18.

[155] "TAC Teams," Oakland Military Institute, accessed March 5, 2019, https://www.oakmil.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=527836&type=d&pREC_ID=1649636.

[156] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 12.

Most notably, Camp SLO is where cadets are introduced to OMI's third pillar: Citizenship. Referencing the school's Philosophy Statement, "cadets learn what is expected of them at the Summer Camp…which thoroughly introduces new students to
the CITIZENSHIP expectations of the school. The disciplinary system [is] patterned after the military model."[162] The camp is run by National Guard (military) staff and are assisted by some civilian staff. One aspect of Camp SLO is the teaching of the California Cadet Corps history and

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[157] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 17.

[158] "Mission," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

[159] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 17.

[160] Admissions Officer, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[161] Admissions Officer, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[162] "Mission," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

traditions. The aim of the camp is to prepare students so that the military drills, customs, and courtesies of daily life at OMI are familiar to them.[163] Along with instructional courses, cadets also undergo physical training and drills. In the National Guard's Summer Encampment 2018 promotional video paints a more vivid picture of the camp. The video begins with the Redlight King song "Born to Rise" as the soundtrack to a montage of young cadets completing military drills.[164] The song's chorus includes phrases such as "So what'd you know about sacrifice," and "We are the ones who were born to rise / We are the ones with the fire inside / I go to war with the brothers I trust /And there ain't no stopping us, there ain't no stopping us." Throughout the montage, cadets can be seen balancing on planks, climbing walls, and marching in unison.[165] This message of survival in the language and symbolism of the Camp SLO boot camp is yet another layer of military rhetoric and culture infused into the OMI experience.

Exposure to military culture also comes in the very obvious form of student interaction with military personnel. Besides the mentorships with members of the Coast Guard Partnership in Education programs, OMI welcomes 18 military cadre members to be full-time OMI staff to teach classes and fulfill other needed roles. These staff members lead LOC classes and drills as well as conduct uniform checks and marching drills. The personal relationships between military staff and students vary—one interviewee who was expelled from OMI explained that it was always the military deans who gave him the most demerits.[166] Other alumni reported positive experiences. The receptionist at OMI, who graduated from 12th grade in 2018, explained that before attending OMI, she didn't know much about the military or have any connections to anyone in the armed forces. After enrolling, however, she became close to the military staff members. She explained that as an OMI student, she learned that the military staff has been through a lot especially those who had experienced war: "Now the way I think about them is that…I see one and I have so much more respect for them because they still have the energy to bed nice to people even though they've been through a lot and have seen a lot of violence."[167]

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[163] "Mission," Oakland Military Institute, accessed January 20, 2019.

[164] California National Guard, "Summer Encampment Promotional Video 2018," accessed February 2, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/HQCACC/

[165] California National Guard, "Summer Encampment," accessed February 2, 2018.

[166] Former OMI student, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

It is important to note that trauma plays an important role at OMI among many of its military staff. This point was brought up in several interviews with alumni, Ms. Grell, and the school's commandant, Colonel Cross. Colonel Peter Cross received his OMI assignment during his deployment in Afghanistan. He arrived at OMI a few weeks after returning and became the school's highest ranking military official. In comparing his two jobs—the military role and commandant role—Cross noted, "I think about this job way more at night than I did in Afghanistan. I would do 18-20 hour days in Afghanistan and go to my tent and I wouldn't even process it, but at this place it's the kids that get into your bloodstream."[168] He had never worked in education before this assignment but explained that as an army police officer who headed trainings, he felt equipped in the educating role. When asked about the transition to a middle and high school environment, he recalled some mistakes that he made upon his arrival.

> On my first day here, I had an insubordinate cadet. I asked him to put his hat on and he said something along the lines of, "F off." And if somebody talked to me like that in the military, they would end up in the brig. In that moment they would be apprehended and so I immediately escalated that event with the kid. I got very aggressive and yelled and I

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[167] Receptionist at OMI, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[168] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

> treated him like he was in the military. It took me a week and a half to realize that the students here are not actually in the military, they're not in the army.[169]

This experience of Cross' transition to a civilian environment and an educational environment dealing with young students at young as 11 brings into question how trauma plays a role within the walls at OMI. While parents consent to their children wearing uniforms, entering the cadet corps, and partaking in military drills, there is no explicit agreement on the exposure of students to military staff so recently deployed in a war zone. While the Colonel's case is not a common one, it still has an impact on the nature of the campus. A soldier from Afghanistan who was actively deployed was exposed to a young student only weeks after returning home---the same soldier without any background in education, much less trauma-informed training. Moreover, Cross submitted that he treated the student "as if he was in the military."[170]

The use of aggressive military-style tactics on OMI students by National Guard soldiers in uniform carries another implication of repeated distress. The majority of OMI students come from areas of the Bay Area where violence is prevalent, implying a certain level of possible trauma. Superintendent Grell believes that understanding trauma is a crucial part of daily life at OMI. In the WASC self-report, it is explained that "Post-traumatic stress disorder is real amongst our children because their lives have been touched by violence in one way or another."[171] It is also noted in the report that Oakland consistently makes it into the list of the top 100 most dangerous cities in the U.S. [172] Thus trauma is a reality not only among OMI's military staff members but also its students.

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[169] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[170] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[171] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges,* 4.

[172] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges*, 4.

One aspect of OMI's military staff that brings into question the relationship between military staff and young students is the appearance of men in authoritative positions in daily combat uniforms. While this phenomenon is not well-studied, it is worth noting the possible influence of the OMI military staff wearing their combat uniform and disciplining young students who may already be traumatized by other men in uniform (such as police officers and ICE officers). Police brutality and violence and its effect on the psychology of children is a topic that has been written about and published in several academic journals. In 2015, Andrea L. Dennis published an article about the lasting effects that young people may experience as a result of exposure to police-related brutality. Dennis warns that children exposed to such violence "face physical, social, emotional, and cognitive harms similar to children exposed to other forms of violence from other sources. She also mentions how children can be legally socialized to distrust the police."[173] Middle school teacher, Ms. Sheridan, noted that as an educator at the Oakland school, she worries about the impacts that uniformed men disciplining possibly traumatized children may have.

> A lot of our kids have either themselves seen it or are close to people who have experienced negative interactions with people in uniform whether that be law enforcement or military…and so I do think for some of our kids having them be in uniform in automatic wall. And though there has been initiatives recently to get a more (gender) diverse military staff, but if you have a male figure in uniform that person now has two walls up.[174]

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[173] Andrea L. Dennis, " Good Cop—Bad Cop: Police Violence and the Child's Mind," University of Georgia School of Law, *Digital Commons,* 53, no. 3 (January 2015): 811-823, https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2059&context=fac_artchop

[174] Ciara Sheridan, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

While OMI has pushed for more alumni and diversity in the teaching staff and faculty, the military staff, as several OMI staff members claimed, is slower to change.[175] The lack of women in the 18 cadre of military staff at the school indicates that the average interaction between a cadet and a soldier will be with man in uniform. The military staff members are required to wear their uniforms and Commandant Cross stated in an interview that he believes it is crucial for the optics: "If we were wearing civilian clothes I think that would dilute the military structure and all the goodness that comes from the discipline."[176] The fact that the military staff is also largely responsible for the discipline at the school calls into question the aggressive interactions that some students may face, especially when faced with a soldier recently returning from active duty.

Not all at OMI share the belief that the uniformed military officers might have trouble finding common ground with students. The exposure to military staff who had previous experience in war zones to young students is a uniting factor according to some at OMI. The OMI receptionist spoke about how she actually developed respect for the military staff on account of the violence they had to experience in war.[177] Superintendent Grell echoed the sentiment that military staff share a unique bond with the kids because of their past experiences. She explained how at first glance, the two groups may seem to come from opposite parts of society, but upon closer inspection, "you realize that a lot of our 'mil' staff can understand the kids in a better way than we can since they have also experienced trauma, even though their version of trauma comes from war."[178]

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[175] Ciara Sheridan, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[176] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[177] Receptionist at OMI, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[178] Johnna Grell, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

The idea that the military staff who undoubtedly experienced trauma on battlegrounds can relate to the young students of OMI who may have experienced trauma in their homes or from violence in their neighborhood is a complicated assertion. Unless any of the military officers were drafted to war before the U.S. military transitioned to an all-volunteer force, it is likely that all of the military staff members enlisted and volunteered for armed service. The students at OMI who experienced trauma on the other hand, did not choose to live in underserved areas plagued by violence or seek out police violence. The notion that the shared experience of post-traumatic stress should be a uniting force to be celebrated calls into question the way that a military institute is addressing the diverse needs of its student body. Should the military staff and students alike exchange stories of grief and violence in an effort to overcome boundaries that exist as a result of police sponsored and racially motivated violence? If the military is entering into the US public education system, is the trauma of its active duty members its foot into the door of underserved and violence plagued communities of color?

Discipline and Restorative Justice: A Sign of Change?

While the disciplinary tactics employed by some military staff reveal moments of post-traumatic experiences and questions about student safety, discipline is still one of OMI's biggest selling points. It is one of the most cited reasons that parents choose to send their kids to the school. According to Serina, class of 2018, "my dad was big on structure."[179] For Estefanie Fuentes, an alumnus and the Superintendent's Executive Assistant, "my mother wanted to send me to a military school because I was having disciplinary problems." For David, who was expelled from OMI in 2014, “my mom wanted to straighten me out. She told me I would be marching every day and doing pushups and that it would teach me some self-discipline.” [180]

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[179] Estefanie Fuentes, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

Faculty and staff also endorse the disciple at OMI as one of its greatest strengths. As mentioned, Jerry Brown was a big believer in the disciplinary aspect of the school, hoping that it would bring some formation into the students’ lives.[181] Commandant Cross explained that, “it’s the structure and discipline,” that draw huge enrollment numbers each year.[182] Middle school teacher, Ms. Sheridan, noted that, “For a lot of our students, as much as they push back against it, this is the one place where they actually have structure and discipline…they want structure because they’re not getting in other parts of their lives.”[183]

How does this discipline and structure *look* within the walls of OMI? Discipline at the school is based on a code of honor, a Cadet Creed, and cadet duties outlined in the student handbook. The Code of Honor is modeled after West Point's code of conduct and states that "no cadet shall lie, cheat, steal nor tolerate those who do.”[184] The Cadet Creed is comprised of 5 pillars:

1) I am an Oakland Military Institute Cadet.I will always conduct myself to bring credit to my family, country, academy, and corps of cadets.
2) I am loyal and patriotic. I am the future of the United States of America.
3) I do not lie, cheat, or steal and will always be accountable for my actions and deeds
4) I will work hard to improve my mind and strengthen my body
5) I will seek the mantle of leadership and stand prepared to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America[185]

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[180] Former student, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[181] “Ex-Governor Bent On Political Re-invention,” *Los Angeles Times,* accessed March 23, 2019.

[182] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[183] Ciara Sheridan, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[184] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 2-3.

[185] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 2-5.

The cadet duties outline expectations for every cadet to follow for their success and for the success of the corps of cadets:

1) Learn and strive for academic excellence
2) Set goals and work hard to achieve them
3) Respect oneself and others
4) Demonstrate integrity and good character
5) Accept responsibility and the mantle of leadership
6) Follow instructions
7) Wear the uniform properly and with pride
8) Use military courtesy
9) Care for the OMI campus
10) Work well as a member of teams
11) Serve the school and community
12) Prepare for success in college
13) Celebrate and take pride in success
14) Be physically fit and active
15) Get involved in school activities
16) The Oakland Military Institute is a college preparatory academy that uses a military framework to promote discipline, teamwork, leadership, citizenship, patriotism, wellness, and development of the total person.[186]

While the code of honor, the creed, and the duties are, for the most part, abstract ideals for cadets to follow, more concrete disciplinary procedures are stated in the handbook's Stages of Progressive Discipline and Suspension and Expulsion Procedures sections. These sections include explanations of minor instances of disorderly behavior to serious problems of harassment, drug abuse, and violence.[187]

For the first 15 years of OMI's existence, the discipline at OMI was based on a merit system. The fourth pillar of OMI, Citizenship, which embodies the disciplinary and behavioral expectations of every cadet, incorporates the merit system in the philosophy statement:

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[186] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 2-5.

[187] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 34-36.

> The disciplinary system, patterned after the military model, is fair and predictable. It uses a merit and demerit system that provides both positive and negative consequences. All cadets share a common set of duties they are expected to fulfill as well as a code of honor requiring absolute integrity. Cadets who do not meet our expectations for conduct, integrity, and/or who do not fulfill their duties forfeit their opportunity to attend OMI.[188]

Up until Grell's appointment, merits and demerits were used by teachers, military staff, and faculty as the first step in any disciplinary scenario. According to one current OMI teacher, demerits were issued for negligible and severe offenses alike. "An untucked shirt and a physical fight both received the same amount of demerits."[189] No matter the nature of an offense, once a cadet acquired 40 demerits, they were expelled. "This only funneled out the kids that needed OMI the most. The most problem students were filtered out. You have to ask, 'where do these cadets go once they are expelled? Are they suddenly not our responsibility?"[190]

One interview with a former student, David, offered deeper insight into the dynamics of OMI before Superintendent Grell's promotion. David, who was expelled from OMI in 2014, felt the impacts of a stricter disciplinary system. He explained how he was given a demerit from teachers for "every wrong turn." He said that when he was asked to leave the school, he had "so many demerits he couldn't even count them." David explained how it felt like the teachers and military staff expected you to act like you were in the military. "It was hard to get yelled at by the military guys in uniform. I could tell they were trying to scare me."[191]

In the past two years, however, some things have started to change. Even staff at OMI have been starting to understand the damage that the strict no-nonsense disciplinary practices were having on the students. One indicator that a change needed to be made was the high suspension and expulsion rates. Just like in the case of David, students were sent to OMI to be "straightened out," but in reality, the kids having the most problems were being weeded out. The WASC self-report of 2014 admitted to the disciplinary problems that arose when the disciplinary job of the school fell mainly on the shoulders of the military staff:

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[188] "Mission," Mission, Oakland Military Institute, accessed December 12, 2018.
[189] Middle School Teacher at Oakland Military Institute, interview by author, November 26, 2018.

[190] Middle School Teacher at Oakland Military Institute, interview by author, November 26, 2018.

[191] Former Student, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018

> Because OMI is a military school, the surrounding community sees us as a an institution that provides discipline and structure to our students…Although the academic staff contributes, the military staff along with the administration have the full responsibility of disciplining students according to the rules and regulations published in student planners. However with the many personnel changes to the military, it has been difficult to maintain a consistent approach. Because of the amount of turnovers, we have not had the time and opportunity to properly train all of the new military staff how to counsel students in order to proactively avoid further instances of misconduct. We acknowledge, that because of this, incidents of suspensions and expulsions have increased significantly… we plan to address this issue.[192]

Johnna Grell became the superintendent of OMI in 2016, and started to address the disciplinary issue which indicates a deeper understanding of the efficacy of military-style discipline among marginalized students. "[Superintendent] Grell changed everything," explained her assistant and alumnus Estefanie Fuentes, "OMI looks a lot different than it did a year ago."[193] Fuentes continued to explain how Grell understood that the old disciplinary system was outdated and unfit for the OMI community. The Superintendent decided once she was promoted to clean house by dismissing certain teachers who had long reputations of relying on the merit system for daily discipline.[194]

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[192] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges*, 34-35.

[193] Estefanie Fuentes, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

[194] Johnna Grell, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

After Grell was hired, she not only abolished the long-held tradition of the merit system, she also began to shift the disciplinary role away from the military staff and onto the civilian staff. One big change was the establishment of the Restorative Justice Program. The RJ program at OMI aimed to deal with disciplinary issues in a new way.[195] Mainly headed by alumni staff members, RJ seeks to frame the disciplinary issues at OMI within the framework of crisis and trauma. Most disciplinary issues at OMI involve problems that are rooted in unstable home life such as gang affiliation, drug and alcohol abuse, and hunger.[196] The RJ handles disciplinary crises in very different ways than the traditional military model:

> Cadets who struggle to maintain the standards of citizenship receive support from the RJ team in the form of 1:1 counseling, restorative circles, mentoring, home visits, and other interventions as dictated by the individual student's needs. RJ is a program that is continuing to grow and develop. Currently, OMI is working on developing tracking systems to demonstrate the progress of the RJ impact.[197]

According to Jose Jauregui, one of the RJ specialists at OMI, "getting Restorative Justice started here was really difficult because the military staff gave us a lot of pushback."[198] Since RJ is still in its first year of operation as an official program, there are still some issues in getting the military staff on board. Even Commandant Cross, who had trouble adjusting to student interactions after his deployment in Afghanistan, began to promote the program. He explained how surprised he was at RJ's success: "I've seen kids where it was worse than any middle east conflict that you've seen who are now compatible, respectful of each other…it's incredible to watch them work through that process."[199] While Jose, Superintendent Grell, and Colonel Cross all recognized that there is still tension between the civilian staff and the military staff in how to run the disciplinary aspect of the school, the recent changes imply that the beginnings of a greater shift are happening at OMI. Staff and especially alumni, who experienced the old demerit system during their time as students, are attempting to correct the damage done by the strict military tactics of the past 18 years. Only time will tell if these changes eventually lead to an overhaul of every aspect of the student militarization at OMI as faculty and staff attempt to undo the damage of the past.

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[195] Jose Jauregui, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[196] Oakland Military Institute, *Western Association of Schools and Colleges*, 4-7.

[197] 2018-2019 Student Handbook, Oakland Military Institute, 34-36.

[198] Jose Jauregui, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[199] Colonel Peter Cross, Interviewed by author, November 26, 2018.

CHAPTER III: EDUCATIONAL CHOICE

The Debate On Educational Choice: Charter Vs Public

The discussion of student exposure to militarization and the attraction to OMI's discipline cannot be separated from OMI's role as a public military charter school. Its charter status is the very thing that allows the military to sponsor and run the school. As mentioned in the history of OMI, this alternative model proposed by Jerry Brown received backlash because of its military component, but also because it was a charter school which many feared would simply lead to a draining of state funds from the public schools in the area.[200] Before this thesis can use the background of student militarization to question the nature of free educational choice at OMI, it is imperative that a context of the school choice debate be provided.

The debate on school choice has received significant media coverage in recent years with Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, making it abundantly clear that she is an adamant supporter for choice policy. One statement from DeVos likens opponents of school choice to "flat-earthers" who are trying to sabotage America's chance at giving students a fair education.[201] This hotly debated term, “educational choice” or “school choice,” comes from educational policies that allow students to attend public schools outside of their districts through voucher programs, magnet schools, and charter schools.

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[200] Coulter III, *Cadets on Campus*, 231-234.

It can be argued that the seeds for the creation of charter schools in America were sown by economist Milton Friedman with his introduction of school voucher initiatives in the 1950s.[202] Friedman, often considered the “father of school choice” believed that the education system should reflect “free private enterprise exchange economy.”[203] He advocated for school vouchers as a means to introduce market-based theory into public education and he set the groundwork for the introduction of charter school policy later on. While Freidman laid the foundation for the charter school movement, the establishment of the first charter school was made possible through a rising diffidence in public schools, neoliberal policies of the 1980s, and a key Supreme Court decision. Distrust in public education was sparked by one report in particular by the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education, commissioned by the Reagan Administration.[204] The report, titled *A Nation At Risk,* included a comparative analysis of the quality of U.S. education and schooling in other countries. The results were shocking: the functional illiteracy rate was 13 percent for 17 year old students and “as high as 40 percent for minorities.”[205] Standardized test scores were the worst in almost three decades. American students consistently placed last in seven out of nine academic categories compared to all other industrialized nations.[206] The report recommended the incorporation of standardized achievement testing to certify advancement and the overall raising of education and graduation standards. This report alarmed Americans with its claim that, "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our future as a Nation and people."[207] This harrowing report legitimized the concerns that the existing public school model was insufficient in the modern education of American youth.

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[201] A.J. Willimgham, “How to Make Sense of the Choice Debate,” *CNN*, May 24, 2017, accessed April 3, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/24/us/school-choice-debate-betsy-devos/index.html.

[202] Mercedes K. Schneider, *School Choice: The End of Public Education?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2016), 27.

[203] Schneider, *School Choice,* 29.

[204] Johnson, “From School Ground to Battle Ground,” 33-35.

[205] Danny Weil, *Charter School Movement: History, Politics, Policies, Economics, and Effectiveness* (Amenia: Grey House Publishing, 2009), 60.

One answer to this educational crisis was the charter school—an institution of public education independent from the local school district which operates under different state laws and district regulations.[208] Students and families can enroll in charter school despite living outside of district lines which alluded to more parental control over which school their child attends. Like other programs which gave more power to parents, such as vouchers and tuition tax credits, charter schools were deemed "choice" schools. Within the history of American public education, charter schools are a relatively new phenomenon. Up until 1991, charter schools, public schools that are able to waive compliance with state and local regulations in exchange for adhering successfully to a specific charter, did not exist in the United States.[209]

The idea of educational choice and the modern school choice movement can be traced back to the US Supreme Court decision in the 1983 case *Mueller v. Allen*. The case involved a challenging of the Minnesota statute which allowed for a stated education tax deduction for independent religious school expenses.[210] The plaintiffs argued that the statute violated the Establishing Clause of the Constitution, which the court dismissed by ruling that the law did not have a primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion."[211] In 1991, Minnesota became the first state to pass legislation allowing for the establishment of charter schools. The law defined charter schools as "public schools of choice run by teachers, parents, community leaders, or other groups, operating under a charter agreement between that group and a state charter authorizer."[212]

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[206] Weil, *Charter School Movement,* 60.

[207] Weil, *Charter School Movement*, 60.

[208] Weil, *Charter School Movement*, 1.

[209] Weil, *Charter School Movement*, 1-4.

Within 7 years of the first charter school in Minnesota, more than 1,100 more emerged in the U.S. with more than a quarter of a million students.[213] The idea of schools that operated under different state laws and standard district regulations was extremely controversial at the outset and continues to be today. Proponents claimed that they were introducing innovative educational opportunities and providing parents with more choice regarding their children's education.[214] In his comprehensive handbook, *Charter School Movement: History, Politics, Policies, Economics, and Effectiveness,* Danny Weil identifies "choice" as a "buzzword for market-based economic and social policies of deregulation and privatization that commenced in the late 1970s and continues today."[215] Charter school policies essentially were created to stimulate competition in the public education system, raising the level of quality instruction and educational standards for all public schools.[216] The deregulation and lifting of district limitations not only denoted a market-*based* system for the education world with the introduction of charter schools, in some cases the schools have actually become for-profit institutions. For-profit educational management organizations operate up to 85% of charter schools, depending on the state. Cyber-charter schools (home-based schools that are 100% online) often own or have ties to curriculum development companies that in general are extremely profitable.[217] Many charter school advocates argued that the decentralized, community-based schools could break up the overcrowded, "factory-style" district public schools and the impersonal and oppressive government bureaucracies that control them. Weil describes how many charter school advocates perceived the state of the educational system during the beginning years of the charter movement: "The 'free market', they argued, held the Houdini key to escape the bondage of underperforming public schools."[218]

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[210] Wayde D. Lewis, *The Politics of Parent Choice in Public Education: The Choice Movement in North Carolina and the United* States (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15.

[211] Lewis, *The Politics of Parent Choice,* 15.

[212] Lewis, *The Politics of Parent Choice,* 15-16.

[213] Weil, *Charter School Movement, 1.*

[214] Belfield and Levin, *Privatizing Educational Choice,* 27-28.

[215] Weil, *Charter School Movement,* 1.

This thesis does not attempt to settle the fervent debate on educational choice between public and charter education, an undertaking far outside the scope of my research and expertise. However, as a public charter school which opened in 2001, OMI's story is also the story of the charter school movement and the school choice debate.

Educational Choice at OMI

The ongoing discourse of educational choice is an important framework to discuss the Oakland Military Institute. The aforementioned political fight to get the OMI charter approved was ridden with the rhetoric of the choice debate. In interviews and opinion pieces during Brown's campaign to open the school, he repeatedly claimed that OMI was about giving Bay Area families more choice in where they send their kids to school. He claimed, "These families and countless others who want an outstanding education for their children have every right to choose among a wide array of educational philosophies, including [a military academy]."[219]

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[216] Weil, *Charter School Movement,* 1-2.

[217] Gregory K. Fritz, "The Charter School Debate," *Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter* 32, no. 8 (August 2016): http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=18950e3b-5e18-41fb-b359-38c04a6403e5%40sessionmgr104&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBlPWlwLHVpZCZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#db=aph&AN=116935876.

[218] Weil, *Charter School Movement,* 2.

With an OMI option that provides uniform, funding, structure, and discipline, there is a ready supply of willing parents. Underserved youth in the Bay Area, thus, find a home at OMI, chosen for them by their parents. However, the choice made to find a better education for kids must also include the inculcation of a militarized identity. In the previous chapter, the militarization of students' identities into the soldier and cadet mold is cemented through an exposure to military symbol, structure, rhetoric, labels, and drills. This exposure re-imagines marginalized students into conformed beings that participate in the wider hierarchy of the United States' armed forces. An inculcation of values is also evident through a curriculum that promotes military ideologies and traditions.

The demographics of OMI further complicate this militarization undergone by students. White families are simply not choosing to send their children to OMI, which means students at OMI are exposed to such recruitment and influence in ways that their white affluent counterparts avoid. The militarization of students of color also implies the subordination of racial identity to a military identity. This re-introduces Bartlett and Lutz's theory of disciplining social difference. In their work, they argue that the JROTC was founded to "Americanize" the immigrant and eliminate the social difference and diversity.[220] The theory, in a contemporary context, translates to the whitewashing of the JROTC student of color, subordinating racial identity to a military identity. With a student body that is only 2.7% white, the militarization of OMI cadets can also be phrased as a subordinating of their racial identities to an identification with the nation through what is presented as the most patriotic of institutions, the military. Through drill and ceremony, OMI students' identities are re-formed in a method that eliminates social difference and re-defines what it means to be American. The "Americanizing" of OMI cadets, in a world where the definition of "American" is conceptualized through hyper-patriotism and militarism, eliminates social difference and prioritizes a military identity over a racial identity. This process further complicates ideas of choice because it is impossible to separate the social difference from the decision families make to send their kids to OMI.

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[219] Brown, "A Few Good Schools," accessed January 2, 2019.
[220] Bartlett and Lutz, "Disciplining Social Difference," 199-125.

It is clear that families choose OMI because they cannot afford private school options and fear sending their kids to public schools in the area.[221] There is also a clear necessity for structure and discipline. Interviews with alumni, former students, teachers, and administrators revealed that the discipline and structure are huge selling points, especially for marginalized students. According to OMI staff and alumni, many students of OMI lack structure, discipline, and stability at home, thus making the school a necessity in the kids' lives. Recall Jerry Brown's vehement defense of the military model: "These kids have a tough time. How are you going to straighten them out if you don't put some formation in their life?"[222] OMI suggests that the method through which to introduce this need of formation is through the military model of drills, uniforms, and, on some occasions, aggressive tactics from former active duty soldiers. This method of introducing structure, by nature, complicates the rhetoric of choice. How free is the choice that families are making to send their kids to OMI when the effect is a militarization of the child's identity? The very reason families choose OMI is because the child *needs* the structure that is lacking in other aspects of life which cannot be found in unaffordable private institutions. Operating under this logic, if OMI's students were not marginalized "at-risk" youth, then there would be no need for the military school at all. The choice, thus, is not a completely free one. It is only made under the conditions of social, racial, and economic disadvantage. The OMI option cannot be presented as a free and unrestricted choice as the school choice debate frames it. It is a result of social inequity.

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[221] Johnna Grell, Interviewed by author, November 27, 2018.

[222] "Ex-Governor Bent On Political Re-invention," *Los Angeles Times,* accessed March 23, 2019.

The exposure to the military is not so much desired as it is needed, in the eyes of many parents. The necessity of structure and discipline, a product of the institutionalized poverty and racism in the Bay Area and American society as a whole, leads to the question of the true nature of free educational choice. Additionally, it should be noted that the military model is responding to the symptoms of a larger problem of social inequity without addressing the source. While it may not be the case that it is the job of OMI to fix the classism and racism of the Bay Area, it is worth noting that public education has been touted as the great American equalizer. In the case of public military schools, they not only fail to equalize but they reaffirm the inequities that exist by disproportionately exposing underserved communities to military recruiting, drills, and ideologies.

CONCLUSION

The case study of OMI illustrates the inequity that exists when the military enters the education system in an underserved community. Jerry Brown's vision for a public military charter school was driven by a lack of structure, discipline, and stability in Oakland public schools and Oakland youth. Instead of addressing the sources of the vulnerability and instability in Oakland, Brown chose a military model to enforce and police the symptoms of a much greater social and economic inequalities.

A public military charter school, as examined in this thesis, carries heavy political baggage and is vulnerable to outside influence. OMI is funded publicly and privately. The result? Big money and special interests are introduced into the public education system. With a high-profile California politician running a school, huge corporations, big banks, and oil magnates rush in with deep-pockets and ulterior motives. Other influences include recruiters. Partnerships with organizations like *Mission: Readiness* reveal implicit strategies to target "at-risk" youth for possible enlistment in the army. Sponsorships by the National Guard and the Coast Guard expose even more explicit methods of influencing cadets into a career in the military. While this over saturation of recruiting does not lead to high numbers of enlisters after graduation, it highlights an over exposure to military interests and it shows how OMI conflates military service with other post-secondary trajectories, such as college.

Students are not just exposed to recruitment, they are exposed to undue militarism during their time as cadets. Once students enroll at OMI and become cadets, they begin a process of exposure to military drill and ceremony, possible aggression from former soldiers with PTSD, and an overall re-imagining of the students' identities at part of the military structure and the inculcation of military values. The curriculum that military staff teach students is utilized as a way to transmit certain ideologies and values with an emphasis on hyper-patriotism. Military uniforms and the use of military language in daily life at OMI further cements the morphing of students to soldiers. The racial demographic of the school makes this re-imagining of student identities a deeper problem. Only students of color are subject to this transformation which implies an elimination of social difference in favor of conformity to a military identity.

Such a process of militarization complicates the narrative of free choice within discourse of educational alternatives made possible by the charter school movement. Oakland parents seek the structure and discipline that private schools provide and public schools don't. OMI, at first glance, is the silver bullet; a free education with an emphasis on discipline. The result is a long line of Bay Area families hoping for a chance to enroll their child. However, this choice for a better education comes at the cost of a militarized identity. The choice OMI parents make is not a totally free choice because it is made as a result of a lack of alternatives. The exposure to the military is the price that families pay for the schools structure and discipline.

A public military charter school, thus, is not the panacea for the all the problems in public education. OMI, as a case study, shows that instead of being a great equalizer, the public military charter education only reaffirms social inequity by exposing marginalized communities to undue militarization and re-imagining students' identities into a military framework, which complicates the nature of free educational choice. The choice to send a child to OMI is not a choice, but a need. A need for stability and structure that cannot be provided by public schools or private schools given their tuition. The source of this need for structure comes from more systemic issues of race and class in the Bay Area and beyond for which the military model is not a quick fix.

While this research and analysis is based on the Oakland Military Institute, many of these findings can offer a framework through which to understand the broader story of military involvement in American public schools. The convergence of the public military charter "trend" with neoliberal policies of privatization and 9/11 era militarization of civil society raises the question of how American children have become fodder in ideological and political battles. While school boards and politicians and military leaders continue to use the American public school system as the arena in which to fight lofty political debates over free market policies and school choice, the children of these schools are the ones who will pay the price. The price that OMI students have to pay is a transformation from students to "disciplined" cadets and soldiers.

Future studies of Oakland Military Institute, or any other public military charter school in the United States for that matter, would enrich this thesis and the scholarly discourse of military involvement in education. A deeper dive into the demographic profiles of all public military schools could reveal if "disciplining social difference" is a phenomenon that occurs whenever the military is involved in education. Does a public military school really only work in the face of poverty and marginalization? And does a public military school only work with the alliance of special interests? A more comprehensive study that looks at the private donors of all public military charter schools could expose patterns in the types of special interests that are influencing the movement. Is OMI, with Jerry Brown as the founder, the rule or the exception when it comes to big corporate donors? A further investigation of the relationships between civilian staff and military staff would add nuance to the discussion of discipline at these schools. Are alternate forms of discipline, like the emerging Restorative Justice Program at OMI, being introduced at other schools as an internal resistance to the authoritarian structure and as a sign that the wave of heightened militarism in schools is waning?

It is impossible to say for sure if OMI and other public military schools will stick around through the next decade of the 21st century. It is also possible that donors' loyalty will fade now that Jerry Brown's political career is over. Maybe OMI's neighborhood will succumb to gentrification, taking any prospective families with it. Perhaps the opponents of school militarization will grow too loud and lead a movement to end the public military charter school "trend," a repeat of the silenced JROTC programs during the Vietnam Anti-War movement. None of this is promised, but one thing is for sure: if American public schools in marginalized communities continue to lack sufficient resources, working class families, who cannot afford private schools, will continue to send their children to the next best thing—even if that means a school that turns students into soldiers.

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